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# MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOV. 1, 1924 NO. 167

FIFTEEN CENTS

FEATURE DETECTIVE STORY

"SOUTHWEST of the LAW"

&

HAMILTON CRAIGIE

FIFTEEN CENTS

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

# Mystery Magazine

Vol. VII NOVEMBER 1, 1924 No. 167

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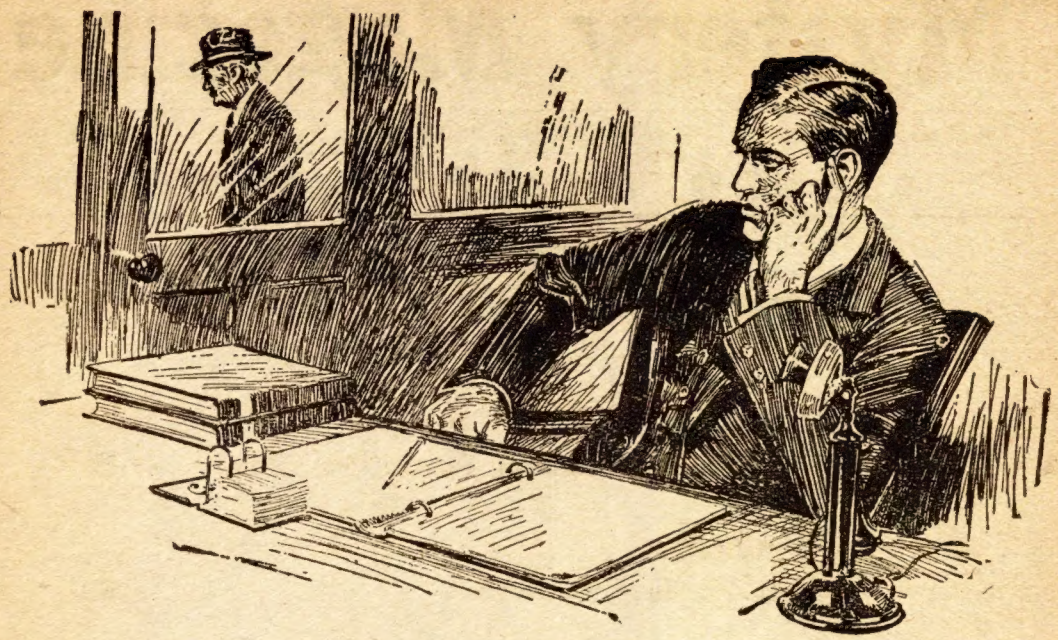

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# "Southwest of the Law"

## by Hamilton Craigie

### CHAPTER ONE

#### SOUTHWEST OF THE LAW

FROM the moment that he had given his ticket to the conductor Stephen Annister had been aware that there was something wrong.

The official had paid him no attention whatever until he had handed him the ticket; then, as he had punched it, Annister had thought to see in the brick-red face an expression that had become all at once queer, constrained.

Leaving his seat for a moment, on his return he had found that the passenger just ahead had swung his chair around, half-facing Annister where he sat.

Beyond noting that this man was short and square, with a smooth-shaven face that was of the color and texture of old ivory, Annister, buried in his newspaper, paid him no heed. Presently, however, he became aware that the blocky man was staring at him; Annister had felt his eyes upon him even through that newspaper; he lowered it now, his gaze, sleepy-lidded, upon the big man where he sat.

"Umm—you going to Fredonia—ha?" offered the latter without preamble, his eyes upon Annister's in a hard, appraising stare, his mouth like a steel-trap beneath his close-cropped mustache.

"As it happens—yes," he said slowly. The man must have seen his ticket; that was it, of course. "Do you know of any reason why I shouldn't?"

Annister disliked the man on sight. Now he stiffened abruptly in his seat as pat upon the question there came the savage answer:

"I know a dozen reasons, young fellow! But if you'll take a friend's advice you'll stay on board!" His grim smile was not mirrored in his eyes. "Because it's a sure unhealthy place for strangers. Now you smoke that with your cigarette!"

The man had turned abruptly without further speech. At first Annister had had an idea that the man was drunk and obviously trying to pick a quarrel; such things were not unusual. But the queerness of it, coupled with that frowning stare of the conductor's, had given him food for thought.

He had never seen the man before; of that much he was certain. He smiled grimly now as, out of the tail of his eye he saw the conductor at the car's end in low-voiced talk with a tall man with a scar. He had caught them looking his way; plainly he had become all at once an object of inter-

est—of suspicion—and of something more. Well, it was all in the day's work.

For that, whatever their interest might be, they had penetrated his identity Black Steve Annister did not believe; he had been very careful about that. He had shaved off his mustache; he was certain that he was unknown, the sole distinguishing mark of his calling the small gold button reversed on the inside of his vest. And nobody had paid him any attention until the surrender of his ticket.

The mystery, if it was a mystery—the shrugs, the looks, the half-veiled and wholly mysterious behavior of the men there in the car—he had in a measure been prepared for that—but he had scarcely expected that it would come so soon.

Rising now, he sauntered forward to the vestibule to meet the conductor passing through.

"Oh, Mr. Annister, just a moment!" the official said, his voice audible above the thunder of the train.

"Well?" asked Annister, and his tone was cold and quiet. "Well?"

But the conductor's expression was the reverse of hostile; his tone, when he spoke, deprecating, apologetic:

"No offence, sir, but if you'll take an old-timer's advice, you stay aboard this train! I thought I ought to warn you, seeing as how"—he paused—"well, Fredonia's a mighty bad place for strangers, mister! All I can say is that it's a close corporation, mighty close, and down here in Arizona, southwest of the law, as you might say, almost anything's liable to happen. They don't know who you are and they don't care; they run things pretty much to suit themselves—judge, jury, officers of the peace. They don't *know* you, mister, but maybe they suspect. And if I happened to be you I'd stay aboard."

"Thanks," returned Annister dryly. "And I mean what I say. But—I'm getting off!"

He turned, walking to his seat, and there on the cushion, tucked into a corner, was a glint of white—a note.

Palming it with steady fingers, he glanced at it behind his newspaper. It was a square of paper, the writing on it in a feminine hand. There had been no woman in the Pullman; Annister had seen none; but now as he fingered the note he seemed to remember the passage of a tall, golden blonde; she had brushed by him as he had been talking to the conductor.

"Be warned in time. Fredonia is not safe—for you. Stay aboard."

There was no signature.

Annister grinned, a mere facial contraction of the lips.

The plot was thickening with a vengeance! But as the train slowed for the station stop at Fredonia he was not prepared for that which followed.

Shouldering his heavy grip, he was approaching the door, when of a sudden, as if uprisen from the floor, he was aware of the blocky man with whom he had spoken back there in the seat.

"You better go right back an' sit down, young fellow!" he said out of the corner of his mouth. "The air is sure unhealthy around these parts, I'm shouting! Now, you go right back an' sit down!"

Annister surveyed the man for a split-second, eye to eye. The train was slowing for the station stop. This—well, it was just a little bit too much!

The blocky man was barring his way, in his glance a truculence that spoke, after all, plainer than any words. They did not know him, and yet they would not let him pass. And to Stephen Annister opposition was like a red rag to a bull.

He turned, lowering the heavy bag; then his fist, behind it the full weight of his two hundred pounds of iron-hard muscle, curved upward in a short arc. There was a spanking thud; the blocky man, collapsing inward like an empty bag, fell face downward upon the flooring.

"The devil you say!" said Black Steve Annister, vaulting to the platform with never a backward glance.

He was practically down and out. Annister's face was wreathed in a grim smile as he surveyed the result of his handiwork.

Such was the manner of his coming.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BEHIND THE ARRAS

IT was coming on to evening as Annister, bag in hand, walked swiftly along the single street to the hotel.

There was a little knot of men standing on the plank sidewalk as he passed; they might have been mining men, punchers—all with high, wide Stetsons, and trousers tucked into boot-tops—save for a certain hard recklessness in their faces, the faces of men, as Annister judged, who would do their work, if they did any work, out of the sun.

But they let him pass without comment. As he went onward to the hotel he was aware of an atmosphere that was electric in the quiet street.

But once in his room and his bag unpacked, following his plan he went downward to the long bar, where openly, and without the usual precautions, drinks could be had by any one who paid the price.

There were three men at the long bar; they glanced at Annister and away as, his elbows upon the mahogany, he drank—then drank again. As a matter of fact, however, he drank but a tenth of what he had ordered, disposing of the remainder by the simple process of spilling it partly upon the bar and partly into the cuspidor at his feet.

Annister would have made a good actor if he had not chosen a more hazardous profession. In a very little while he was to all outward seeming more than three-parts drunk, and in accordance with his rôle, now staggering heavily to a chair, he sat down in the shadows at a small table behind which was a partition. Annister had noticed that partition and the alcove behind it.

Now he sat down heavily, head resting on his crossed arms, the bartender exchanging a wink with the three men opposite as, in the doorway there came a tall man booted and spurred, accompanied by another and a smaller man; the two passed inward to the dining-room at the rear without speech.

But as they passed the apparently sleeping Annister the tall man froze rigid where he stood.

"Umm!" he whispered, his glance upon his companion in an abruptly questioning look. For a moment he hesitated, in the short man's face a sudden tight-lipped threat, then they had vanished in the shadows at the rear.

By now it had come on to evening. Annister, listening with all his ears, heard on a sudden the soft scrape of a chair; then a thick whisper like a wedge of sound; it sounded from the partition at his back.

"Frisco, you saw him; what's his game—ha? But he seemed dam' well drunk just now, I'll tell a man!"

Annister knew well enough that they were discussing him. But he listened now as the purring voice went on:

"Tonight, then, at Benrimo's—Shorty an' you, Cranch an' Tucson Charlie Westervelt. Idaho reports he had t' bump off the express messenger on that last stick-up this side of Mojave. Well, so-long, you guys; we're all set."

There came a scraping of chairs as the men arose; then as they passed him going out Annister could feel those eyes boring into his back.

But nothing happened.

The door slammed shut; then—and Annister must have seemed like a man fathoms deep in dreams—there came a quick hand on his shoulder and a voice:

"Hey, there—tumble up!"

Annister muttered, stirring in his seat; then he looked up, heavy-lidded, to face the bartender. The long room was empty; it was late. The bartender, a big man with, for a bartender, a singularly square jaw and an eye that was like a brad-awl, spoke suddenly behind his hand:

"Benrimo's—know where it is?"

The harsh whisper cut like a knife-blade through the silence.

Annister grinned. For a man who had consumed more than his share of hard liquor he seemed singularly bright-eyed, alert. He grinned again, favoring the knight of the apron with a prodigious wink, as for a half-minute the latter spoke rapidly and low.

"Benrimo's, Steve—that's right close to the feed-and-grain store; you can't miss it. I couldn't write, and I had no chance to wire, but you've seen and heard a little—ha? They're a bad bunch, an' they've got Fredonia in a triple cinch—judge, jury, the whole kit-and-caboodle. And it was Rooker—you saw him on the train—tall man with a scar running from eyebrow to chin—that started it. Supposed to be a lawyer, sure—but I think he's a 'con'; smooth as oil, though; you never see his hand. An' the only way to put the darbies on 'em is to get 'em with the goods."

He paused, his quick glance searching the shadows, his hand going to his belt. Then he continued:

"I'm pretty sure they don't suspect me—*yet*. I gave them a straight story right out of Dannemora," he chuckled. "Now, I'll be there with bells! There's an empty loft just over the feed-store; you can get in there from the outside at the back—you'll see—but you watch your step."

He paused again as, out of the shadows at the rear there came a sudden movement like the flicker of a wind-blown leaf.

---

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE TRAP

TOGETHER, Annister in the lead, guns out, they rounded the partition at a plunging rush, to find—just nothing.

The bartender, his face gray under its tan, blinked in the sudden effulgence of the light as Annister's hand, reaching, had snapped on the switch. But there was no one there.

And then abruptly Annister stiffened like a pointer at gaze.

There on the table was a note pinned down with a bowie-knife.

Annister, reading it, handed it the bartender in silence.

"MISTER BLACK STEVE ANNISTER: You did me a favor once, so—watch your step. They're not wise—yet—but they suspect. And when they know you'll never go back home—except as freight.

"A FRIEND."

Annister, his face dark under the light, stood for a moment, his brows wrinkled in a frown.

Turning to the bartender with a whispered word, at the latter's hand upon his sleeve, he waited as the words came slow in a breathing murmur:

"That's Rooker's girl, Steve! I know the hand. Well, what do you know about that!"

But once in his room Annister, opening his heavy bag, smiled grimly now, his eyes with a quick stare upon the closet and the bed.

The bag had been ransacked by a practised hand.

Another might never even have suspected, but Annister knew, and knowing, with his hand upon the lining of his coat, he grinned without mirth, closing the bag and snapping out the light.

Then—for by this time it was black dark—he ran up the window with a careful hand, to lean outward a moment; then, coasting down the water-pipe, had gained the roadway and the quick-breathing night.

Annister had no self-delusions as to that which he was about to do. These were desperate men, southwest of the law, indeed, for such law as might be found here was their own. But so far they had flourished, a law unto themselves: plundering, hi-jacking, running the country ragged with their long-riding, hard-bitten band of outlaws who in the daytime took their ease under the protection of the "law."

It was a large order for Annister to capture them, because, with a man for leader whose cunning more than matched that of the wolf, so far there had been no slightest actual proof of their guilt.

Thinking these thoughts, he went forward now in the dense darkness that was like the bottom of a well until, in the gray loom of a building just across, he halted, feeling forward to where, against the clapboarded wall, there was a door.

But the door was locked and barred.

Above him, as he was aware from the bartender's description, there was another door—it would be open; the bartender had seen to that. But the wall sprang sheer; there was not handhold on it for a cat.

Annister, waiting a moment, heard nothing—no sound. Then from beneath his coat he produced what might have been a jointed fishing-rod; he made a cast and a brief tug backward told him that he had struck. Then up the wire ladder that had opened out following his cast he mounted, rung by careful rung, to find himself facing that upper door.

He pushed it open slowly, carefully, moving in a darkness that was like soot, until just beneath the flooring there was a small, round hole.

From below as he stood rigid listening, holding his breath, there came a brief murmur of voices, the clink of glass, a thick oath. He bent, looking downward through the hole, to see a group of men; he counted them—six—they were seated at a round table, Rooker at the head.

Just under his hand Annister made out to feel what seemed to be a trap-door; well, he must be careful of that. But he listened, breathless now, to the slow words of the tall man with the scar:

"Well—we're all here now, Idaho; it's up to you!"

The man called Idaho, a swart, short fellow with a face scarred and scabbed with late-healed cicatrices and pocked blue with powder burns, spoke out of the corner of his mouth; his voice reached the listener above in a hoarse, snarling rumble:

"A hundred thousand, Chief—an' it's all here! We flagged the train like you said, uncoupled th' engine; th' rest was like takin' candy from a baby! But that dam' messenger—he had no sense! I bored him—an' Tucson Charlie an' me, we come a-fannin' an' a-foggin' thisaway hell-bent. Same old dead-open-an'-shut, Chief, I'll tell a man!"

Annister drew in his breath with a sudden sharp, hissing inspiration. At last! For as he listened now, it was enough, and more than enough, evidence at the last sufficient to set in motion the slow wheels of Justice in that great city three thousand miles distant, a century removed.

Then he heard a grim, grating laugh. There came a slither of wood upon wood, a wrench, a twist; his hand, palm downward upon the trap-door, of a sudden felt empty air; then, spread-eagled sidewise in a flying fall, he had crashed downward, turning in air, to land, cat-like, upon the balls of his feet.

Dazzled by the light, he could see merely an encircling ring of faces; they grinned, ferocious as wolves, as, ringing to the rafters, he heard a voice:

"Black Steve Annister—welcome to our city! Now—you infernal dick—we've got you, and we've got you good!"

---

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE SHARPSHOOTER

IT was Rooker's voice.

Annister, with that ring of death about him, faces wolfish under the light, felt that it was the end. Fool that he had been, he told himself, not to have seen and known. That trap-door and the fact that he had been there above them—the thing was plain. They had played with him, hooked him, and now he would never go back.

Behind him and a little to one side there was an open door, and beyond this door, as he could see, was a pool-table, its shaded light shining on a rack of balls. That much he could see as, his wide mouth smiling in a grin of death, Idaho swung up his gun.

Annister, a scant three paces from that door, saw and weighed everything in one lightning glance of flashing appraisal. Hemmed in as he was, with that pistol leveled at his heart, awaiting merely the pressure of the killer's finger, to go for his own gun would be of no avail; he could not even go down fighting, one against the mob.

But for a split-second Idaho hesitated. In that instant the operative had acted.

Hands pressed flat upon the flooring, as a sprinter beating the gun, he hurled himself

forward and away, even as the killer's gun crashed, roaring in the narrow room.

Annister's leap had taken him into and through the doorway, the killer's bullet driving into the casing with a smacking thud as, in a long dive under the pool-table, the operative, rising at the far end, came into action; in the narrow door the bandits, cursing, impeded each other in their rush.

The operative's gun was gone; he had known it in the split-second that he had made that leap. Now, however, as the dark face of Rooker showed for a moment in the press, the operative had taken aim and fired—a pool ball, curving in a short arc, had struck the leader fair. Full between Rooker's eyes it landed with a sound like the sound of a butcher's cleaver on the chopping-block; the lawyer staggered, collapsed backward with a grunt as, raging, the others, Idaho in the lead, burst inward.

But the door was narrow. Before he had been a detective Annister as a baseball player had been more than fair. Now as a conjurer manipulates his globes Annister hurled his heavy missiles in a steady stream; they hurtled forward with the speed of light, each to its mark.

In that narrow doorway, crowding close, they were, for the moment, powerless against this human tornado sharpshooting at a distance at which it was impossible to miss. Gun-play was useless. The door would not hold more than two of them together; now with the six struggling, cursing, their leader down, Idaho sprawled his full length, the operative, hurling the last of his ammunition in a sudden burst, had leaped through the rear door and away.

He must run for it—but whither?

Behind him, as he well knew, the bandits, desperate now, would in a moment be on his trail. And it was when, turning the angle of the wall, he was bunching his muscles for the quick, desperate sally backward to the hotel that he groaned, stumbled, slumped downward to the dust.

As the last flicker of conscious thought remained it seemed to Annister that he had heard, as a sound heard in dreams, the low drone of a motor rising and dying against the night.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "ROOKER'S GIRL"

ANNISTER awoke to a cool wind blowing upon his forehead. Again he was hearing the drone of the motor, but abruptly the cool wind had changed to something else—a hand, cool and soft, that rested upon his forehead, and was withdrawn.

Opening his eyes, he was aware of the night sky and the stars; the cloud-rack had rolled off to the west; and then, as the car purred onward, he saw on a sudden a face like a white, glimmering oval, as the voice reached him as on a bridge of dreams:

"They got you—in the shoulder—high up. An inch lower and they'd have fixed you good!"

The girl's voice came above the rattle of the engine; the operative knew it even as he knew that he was, somehow, safe, secure. For it was the golden-haired girl he had seen on the train.

"I warned you twice," he was saying. "But I must say it didn't seem to do a bit of good, Mister Black Steve Annister! If I hadn't been waiting for—for Mr. Rooker"—she hesitated, then went on—"they'd have got you plenty!"

"Waiting for Mr. Rooker!" Annister sat bolt upright in his seat, then subsided with a stifled groan. The girl's voice went on, like a cool wind:

"Easy does it, Mister Steve! If you keep quiet I know a place where you'll be all right in two or three days. Now, we'll be there in no time at all."

Annister could not put the pieces together, dozing finally to wake at a low word from the girl:

"We're here, partner," she said.

In a little clearing there was a cabin, a shack, built against two conifers, that, rising, showed clear where their black holes met high up, to form a platform, and from this platform, as he could see, there ran a rope ladder winding and twisting like a snake downward to the hut.

"The lookout," explained the girl, her firm hand under her companion's elbow as,

with a twisted grin, he hobbled from the car. "Rooker's not wise to this," she told him. "We're safe—but I'd give something to see his face when he finds me gone."

The cabin was well furnished, simply but with a touch of comfort, as Annister could see. Propped on a narrow bunk, he watched, in his eyes a faint glow that was like a fire lighted, as the girl, busy with the sheet-iron stove, paid him no heed.

Gazing at her, he was aware of a sudden warmth about the heart, and with it, after a moment, a swift, invading chill that was like a cold, probing hand.

Unreasonably he found himself wishing that she was not Rooker's girl, for although she had saved his life, what was she to him? Strangely, illogically, of a sudden he had an insane desire to rise, take her in his arms, hold her for just long enough to give and to receive one kiss. And as if, somehow, she felt the burden of his thought, she turned and a slow flush enveloped her from the bare hollow of her throat upward to the white forehead, with its chestnut curls.

She frowned delicately, but she did not meet his eyes. Then:

"Dinner's most ready, partner," she said, and again, at the word, Annister's pulse leaped up in answer as, propped in his bunk, she ministered to him with a sudden, impersonal detachment, her face expressionless, the smile gone from his lips as, abruptly she began to speak:

"I warned you—twice. You see, I didn't know you were—an operative. I knew—well, you see, I didn't want to see you killed, I reckon, and Rooker 'd shoot a man just for the pleasure of seeing him kick. They're a bad bunch, worse than the old Jackson's Hole gang; the whole town's in on it; and they're not merely suspicious of strangers, they don't *let 'em leave!* That is, if they try to stay longer than overnight."

She paused, her eyes on a sudden raised to his.

Again he was hearing her voice like bells chiming in the narrow room:

"Crime, incorporated — that is what Rooker calls it—he and Idaho and Tucson Charlie Westervelt and Shorty, killers, all of them, but Allison Rooker's the worst of the lot!"

Raising upon one elbow, the detective's fingers, reaching, had closed upon her slim wrist in a grip of iron.

---

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE FACE IN THE FOREST

IT was not upon her rounded shoulder that the operative's gaze had rested, but where the flannel shirt, turning backward with the movement, had shown on a sudden the dull glint of gold, the badge of the Secret Service.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked low, and now at a something in his face the girl's eyes answered him with a straight, level look.

"Because—I was coming to that," she told him. "And—and you believed that I was Rooker's girl!"

She an operative! Annister would scarcely have believed it, but then he knew well enough that the bartender, for instance, working with him, would have alike deceived had he not known. And he knew, too, that it was a rigid rule of the department that the left hand, say, would know nothing of what the right hand would be doing; it was nothing uncommon for half a dozen men working on the same case to be, each of them, aware only of his particular part.

Annister had heard that, in addition to the "bartender," another operative had been sent on ahead, but he had had no instructions from his chief other than to expect the unexpected. Abruptly he spoke, and his voice vibrated with a something deep down that he could not quite control:

"Well, partner—I'm glad!" he said. "Of course, I didn't know who you were, and I apologize here and now for associating you with this fellow Rooker, even in thought! But—I've evidence enough, and pretty soon I've got to send a wire, somehow, some way; my pal, the barkeep, 'd do it if he had the chance. And so——"

"I've already sent it," the girl told him simply. "Now you go to sleep. I'll wake you if—if I should need *protection*"—her smile probed Annister's abashed glance like a lance of light—"and now you go to sleep."

Annister awoke to the sound of soft breathing somewhere in the dark, and with it the first faint fingers of the dawn upon the hills. Testing his shoulder, he found it stiff and a little sore; but the wound had been but a flesh-wound; in a day or two, thanks to his excellent condition, it would be as good as ever; he would be his own man with the rising of another sun.

Lowering himself gingerly over the edge of the bunk, he found that he could stand upright; then, taking a rifle from a rack of two behind the door, he went onward slowly along the forest path.

A face like the face of a devil, seamed and twisted with passion, peered outward from a bush, the stock of a Winchester cradled against his cheek—the face of the killer, Idaho. A moment he started outward at the tall figure on the trail; then, grinning his cold grin, his finger was tightening on the trigger. Then, as if he had heard something that Annister had not, he vanished. A minute passed; then five; then down-wind there came the flat crack of a rifle like the breaking of a stick.

He was perhaps a half mile from the cabin; by this time, as it seemed to him, the girl must be awake; perhaps, discovering him gone, she might find cause for worry; he had better be getting back.

And it was then that with the flat crack of the rifle he stood for a breathing instant like a man turned to stone. For, hard upon its echo, down-wind in the crisp morning air, there had come, on a sudden, the high scream of a woman.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### A KILLER PASSES

ANNISTER, the blood pounding in his temples, broke into a lurching run. That high-pitched call—he would have known it among a thousand!

His wound had opened; he could feel the slow stain spreading, soaking into his shirt. The rifle, a dead weight cumbering his rush, he flung from him as, rounding a granite outcropping, he saw—and seeing, cursed once, a man's clean oath, or he thought that he did; but the sound was little better than a croak.

There in the cabin doorway he saw the girl.

Facing her, but with his back to Annister, with his short bow-legs and long arms, simian in their suggestion of the brute, stood Idaho; Annister, although he could not see it, could feel the grin, the lecherous lips lifted above the stained and broken teeth.

And like a broken lily, a pale and crownless rose, a handkerchief across her mouth, wrists bound together with a rawhide thong, she saw Annister even at the moment that the killer, wheeling to the right-about, swung up his gun, a poisonous, grim smile on his wide mouth.

Aware that the girl, armed, hearing the shot that would have accounted for the operative, might have been a danger, Idaho had held his hand back there on the trail, for he had been certain that the operative would return. But he had not counted upon Annister's speed, disabled as he was.

The killer's pistol went up and out; it roared twice, the double report blending into one, as Annister, shortening his stride, dove as a football player dives, low and hard, beneath those guns; his left arm, like an iron bar, drove down, steel fingers hooking into the man's ankles; he grunted, heaved, and the killer rose as if on wings to fall, as a tree falls, backward upon the rock.

Annister heard from the girl a choking cry, and through a crimson mist, weaving, out almost upon his feet, he beheld Idaho rising to his knees. He saw the stiff hand, clawlike, reach in a lightning stab for the fallen pistol; it seemed to hang for a split-second, motionless; it was like a slow-motion picture, Annister thought; there was the killer's hand, reaching for the pistol; in a moment he would grasp it—and Annister was unarmed.

And then as the killer's fingers closed upon the pistol something burst in Annister's brain with a singing crash; the veins in his neck and temples stood out in ridges; he straightened, hurling himself forward at full length as the gun crashed almost in his face.

He felt the searing passage of the bullet like the blow of a giant hand; he felt his hat lift, blown backward as in a wind of death; then, lunging at full length, his fist had landed on the killer's cheek-bone with a spanking thud.

Idaho's head went backward with a snap; his face grayed to a sort of gray-green pallor, the pistol flew out and up, jerked from his stiff fingers with the motion. Then all at once his eyes turned inward with a dreadful squint; a bloody froth edging his stiff lips, he lurched, stumbled, recovered—to fall, face downward, upon the rock.

Annister, rising to his knees, got slowly to his feet. Staggering like a man drunk, for a moment the rock-face heaved and pitched beneath him like a sea. He gazed downward at the killer, moistening his dry lips. Idaho was dead, his neck broken by the terrific impact of that socking punch. He turned sidewise to the girl.

A quick knife-slash and she was free. The gag removed, she faced him now, gaze misty-bright, with, between them at that high moment, a silence that was like a stone dropped in the still waters of a mountain pool. Then like the dawn upon dim peaks, her face under his gaze turned slowly, rose, her hand went out, touching him upon the forehead, the cheek.

"You came!" she said low, and the words were not so much a question as a statement of fact. "I knew that you would come to help me.

"Your shoulder!" she breathed. "Now lean on me—so—oh—he careful, please!"

And again in the shack and in his bunk Annister, drifting between dreams, heard, as from dim leagues of distance, her voice out of the shadows:

"Your shoulder—it'll be all right in a day or two—but it will take some mending."

Following the coming of Idaho, for a long, golden week Annister lay passive, at the end of the seventh day rising with the setting of the sun to stand with the girl upon the flat rock that overlooked the Basin, and Fredonia set like a bandbox village on the plain.

Together they made their plans, Annister turning to the girl after a moment with a sudden smile:

"Partner," he said; then with a fleeting grin: "Partner—I like that! But, as it happens, I do not even know your name."

The girl gazed at him with a sudden affectation of primness, but her eyes, under their smooth, golden brows, shone as to their depths with a quick-leaping spark.

"Number Thirty-three, if you please, sir," she told him primly. "And yours?"

"You have it," he said, and again, eye to eye, they laughed together on a low, brooding note.

Annister, walking beside the girl, felt all at once a sudden bleakness of the spirit that was like death. What if she did not care for him? And he, hard-bitten, a wanderer in the waste places of the earth, an Ishmael, with his hand against every man's—who was he that he should look for it?

Then abruptly there seemed the rushing thunder of stampeding hoofs.

They looked, and down upon them in the narrow way they saw the long riders, Rooker in the lead.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ANNISTER RIDES ALONE

THEY heard a yell, high, savage, snarling, between the highways as the bandit leader's horse charged down.

"There they are! Now go get 'em!" and the pounding of the hoofs as, almost abreast, the lawyer-bandit, his dark face with its transverse scar, savage, exultant, threw down his gun.

Annister at the first sight of the horsemen had put the girl behind him, bringing up his gun. But in the face of that overwhelming attack he knew that it would

avail him little. One or two, perhaps, he might account for, and then, bestriding their horses they would ride him down—ay, and the girl.

The leader's gun crashed even as the operative, firing beneath the flash, saw his horse rear, heard above the noise of the hoofs the high-pitched, snarling oath; saw where his bullet had struck home, the gun-hand dripping red—then, as a dream seen in a mist, the riders had come level; two riding, bit to bit, swerving abruptly to the left, bore down upon him and the girl.

He pulled the trigger, but his hammer clicked upon an empty magazine; then he hurled outward and away as the foremost of the horses struck him fair.

He lurched, recovered, going to his knees as a burst of bullets tore through the place where he had been, to see, as the long-riders swept onward, the two leaning from their saddles, spur forward on either side the girl.

And between them, as Annister got stiffly to his feet, he saw her on a sudden lifted, swung; then, with the pound of hoof-beats they were away.

Annister, with a heart like lead in his breast, heard the diminishing echo of those hoof-beats vanish from less to less, die into silence—a silence that was like a vacuum of sound and sense. He cursed once, a bitter, brooding malediction, wasting no time, however, in vain self-reproach, but making what speed he might backward to the hut.

He forced himself to a hard-held calm as, going forward to the shack, he found the car as they had left it, the tank three-quarters full. He could not follow them along that trail unmounted, but he could make speed downward to Fredonia and the one man, if he was still alive, who might give aid. Loading his pistol, as also the remaining Winchester, he threw in the clutch and the car shot forward down the long road to the town.

Driving like a man possessed, with ever at his back the spectre of his fear riding him like a goad, he reached the single street, roared down it, his keen gaze upon its echoing, empty dust.

It was as if the town emptied overnight, he thought, and with it he had an impression as of a stage set and waiting, for what he could not have told.

He jammed on the brakes, leaving his engine running to burst in at the hotel entrance at the double-quick. For a moment he could see nothing; then, at a voice out of the darkness, his heart leaped up:

"Annister—well, jumpin' horned toads!"

It was the "bartender."

Annister told him the story in a quick rush of words; then, at the other's wondering exclamation, he made a quick, sudden turn:

"Shoot, Harvey!" he exploded. "What's it mean? The town—are they all dead? What's happened—and for God's sake, man—hurry!"

The "bartender" grimaced.

"Sho!" he said. "There's sure been hell a-poppin', with th' lid off, and then some! Rooker raised merry blazes the way you run that whizzer on him at Benrimo's place; he was sure fit to be tied. And then it seems somehow they got wind that the deputies were coming—Easley and the rest—must've been a leak somewhere; and so, sharp at sunup, they pulled their freight, a-fannin' and a-foggin' f'r th' Tontos—I got it straight."

He paused, pouring three fingers neat. Annister made an explosive, quick comment. Harvey went on:

"I got t' stay here—you know that, Steve—but I listened in, and I know that Rooker was dead set for Number Thirty-Three"—he paused—"no, he wasn't wise to who she is, but he must have figured where you'd gone. As I overheard it, they aimed to find her eliminate you in the process, and then he and Westervelt and Shorty—six or eight of 'em altogether—were to ride for that old hang-out under Sentinel Butte, the rest to scatter, meeting later north of Jackson's Hole."

Again he paused; drank, resuming, at Annister's quick head-shake:

"Well, I sure thought that you had cashed, partner," he was beginning, but Annister, turning with the word, his face averted, put out his hand.

"I'm going," he said. "I'll find her; but

if I don't come back, I'm leaving 'em to Easley and you."

He flung out a hand and was gone. The bartender, listening, heard from the stable at the rear the quick beat of hoofs; then, passing the hotel entrance at a pounding run, horse and rider had disappeared into the grim fastness to the north.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### THE BATTLE IN THE SHACK

AS he rode onward at a stretching run Annister was not thinking of that which he must do, but of the girl.

He was soon entering a dry, sandy wash, on either hand high walls of sandstone rising sheer. It behooved him to be careful now; they might conceivably have set a man on watch; perhaps at that moment from the cliff-face just above he might be lying hidden, Winchester trained upon the horseman riding up the wash.

Dismounting in the shadow of a dense stand of spruce, the operative, circling the trees, brought his binoculars to bear upon the butte, distant scarcely half a mile; its long shadow split by a deep cleft in which, as the watcher knew, hidden from the gaze of the passer-by without, there was a cabin built of heavy logs.

At first he could see nothing, but in a moment as he looked a man had dropped suddenly from the shadow to the light. At that distance he seemed immovable, moving no faster than the minute-hand of a watch, but through his glasses Annister could see the alert movement of his head, the dragging shuffle, as he turned backward to the hut.

It was Shorty.

Annister was wearing two guns now; they were strapped down on either side, well forward, for greater freedom of action, the custom of the two-gun man; and as a gun-fighter Annister, as a line-rider in the old times, had been more than fair.

He turned now, climbing upward across the slippery shale until with the red butte on his left, and distant not more than two hundred yards, he halted, waiting for the night.

Twice as he lay there rigid as a rock he saw two men come out, gaze for a long minute into the south, and then vanish in the shadows of the cleft. Then, with the setting of the sun, he stirred for the first time, getting stiffly to his feet.

In perhaps ten minutes it would be over, he reflected grimly—over, either way—the sands were running out; it was a hundred-to-one chance that he would win; but as a gambler staking his all on the hazard of a last, desperate cast, Annister went forward now, invisible in the thick darkness, until, deep in that riven gash he halted abruptly, as a line of light cut through the darkness in a swift stab of flame.

A door had opened, closed; it had given him the direction of the shack toward which, moving with the stealth and caution of an Indian, he crawled now on his hands and knees, until close against the wall he heard the low, growling murmur of voices and the click of cards.

Annister was at the rear. And as to the cabin he was aware of something that the men inside were not: a sliding panel, a long board; shoulder-width, it ran upward to the height of a tall man, and beyond it; Annister, his fingers sliding upon the wood, grinned in the darkness as for a brief instant he felt it give, bending a little inward with his slow, silent touch.

Through a crack in the board he had a good view of the room and of the men within it, but he breathed deep as, facing him across the long room, eyes wide and staring, mouth set in the compression of a chill despair, he saw the girl.

She had been lashed upright against the log-wall with a ruthless hand, while intent upon their game the six men at the table shuffled and dealt, drank from the brown bottle passing from hand to hand; the operative counted them: six—but it was enough.

Still he waited in a sort of iron calm, his fingers reaching upon that board, eye to the crack. His moment was almost come. And

it came now with the voice of Rooker, snarling above his cards:

"Where's Idaho—ha? He's late, because in the morning we'll be moving on to 'fresh fields'—ha, Westervelt? But that's an allusion you wouldn't understand! Now——"

With the bottle at his lips, Westervelt dealing, Shorty, both hands on the table in plain sight, the others intent upon the cards—it was the moment for which Annister had waited. Now the panel fell inward with a crash, and through the opening Annister, guns out, burst into the room.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### ODDS—AND THE MAN

HE came shooting, the ripping crashes of his guns roaring in the narrow room like a swift thunder; his gun-hand vomited lightnings unbelievably swift—and at that short distance it was impossible to miss.

His first shot, aimed at Rooker, would have struck the leader fair, save that, upon the instant, the lawyer had bent forward in his seat. It drilled the mestizo through the forehead even as Annister's second shot struck the Albino's shoulder, whirling him off balance to a slumbering fall.

Dazed for the moment, for the tenth of a whirling second the long-riders sat rigid in their seats; then hell burst with the crashing of the guns.

It was now four to one, but the four no common men, but killers, past-masters of the art indeed; the operative's life hung by a hair as, diving beneath the flashes of the guns, his hand, reaching, had upended the table; behind it now he shot, and his bullets found their marks.

Never during a lifetime of hazard had he been called upon to the last limit of his skill as in this tempest of death which hemmed him round, driving upon him all ways at once; but the miracle could not endure, he knew.

The mestizo lay where he had fallen, perhaps three paces in his front; further on a giant with a broken nose and a hard mouth snarling and grim even in death. Shorty, his back against the wall, sat nursing his injured knee. Annister's pistols had taken a heavy toll.

And now, as Westervelt, his lips set in a twisted grin, leaned forward, Annister, crouching behind that table, saw on a sudden the lawyer's hand flash sidewise and down; the heavy knife, thrown by a practiced hand, sang past his ear as Westervelt, leaping forward with a curse, had fired twice pointblank.

Annister saw him come even as the heavy table rose as if on wings; it hurtled forward, crashing them against the wall. The officer, gun out, waited, but there came no sound, no sign. Then, jerking the table backward, he looked—and a grim smile was born about his mouth.

Tucson Charlie Westervelt, victor in a score of desperate gun-battles, lay huddled beneath the window, unmarked save for the bruising impact of that crushing blow. And Rooker, bad man extraordinary, whom no man, so it was reported, had fought and lived to tell of it—Rooker was gone!

Annister, glancing at the shattered window, saw and understood. He turned now to the girl, a pulse in his temple throbbing with a quick violence; his knife went out, and in a moment, swaying, she was in his arms.

"You came!" she murmured low. "Ah, I knew that you would!"

But peril, racing with the racing seconds, drove them to action now, with the need for speed and yet more speed. Rooker was gone, but he would return leader of a score. Annister, leading the way outward to the horses, they chose two, mounted and were away into the darkness at a stretching run. Passing the stand of spruce where he had left the animal he had ridden from the town, he cast loose the picket-pin; then, once more in motion, he led the way upward along the trail until, mile high above the level floor of the desert, he drew rein, turning to the girl. His words were brief, prosaic, matter-of-fact:

"Rooker'll be burning the wind," he told her, unslinging his binoculars, "and he'll be

after us, certain sure! Our one chance is Easley; he'll be about due, and Rooker knows it, and he's pulling his freight. But he'll pick us up on the wing, if he can do it. Now I'll have a look—see?"

A long moment he gazed, then, his face sombre, handed the glasses to the girl.

"He's coming, if I'm any judge," he said simply. "See that moving shadow against the white? Horses! And they are headed this way."

In confirmation of his words the moon, rising behind a cloud-bank in the west, showed them, as at the lifting of a curtain, that moving cloud, and out of it now even as they watched there came all at once a bright, twinkling flash—another—like distant heliographs: moonlight upon the barrels of the guns.

Wheeling their horses, they stormed upward along the trail, which presently, a dim ribbon of white, rang hollow with the sound of their hoof-beats upon stone.

Daylight was reddening the peaks when, just ahead, they saw it; a natural fortress hewn from the solid rock, and from this coign Annister, glasses leveled upon the bench beneath, gazed briefly down. For a long minute, the binoculars in his hand, he sat his horse motionless, his brief, appraising glance upon the beetling scarp above; there was but one way into it, and in that narrow vent one man might hold out against a score.

"They've split," he said. "They'll come at us both ways at once—about twenty altogether, I think. They've got us—like that!"

He opened and closed one muscular, strong hand, the knuckles whitening with the pressure, turning the horses with the word upward among the stones.

"We'll make our stand here," he told her. Then with a sudden, eager glance, dismounting, he leveled a forefinger into the north.

"By Godfrey, I never thought of it!" he snapped. "There—to the north! We couldn't make it, *both;* but you, partner, ride! You can make it around above the Tonto; I'll hold 'em long enough for that!"

But the girl surveyed him with a level look.

"No!" she said, the single syllable. Then: "I can handle a gun! At any rate, I can load one. Why don't you try me and see?"

This girl, of fire and ice compounded, Annister thought; this girl, who could ride as a man rides, handle a gun like a man, and with it abate not one shading of her feminine allure—she was a partner to be proud of!

Under his gaze, frankly admiring, a something close, she flushed, but her eyes met his with a grave, steady sweetness, on her lips the shadow of a smile. They entered that narrow cleft now, Annister leading, and with the horses bestowed within the wall, waited in a tension growing with the seconds for the attack which would not be long in coming, they knew.

The horsemen had disappeared.

And then a hand's-breadth from his ear there came a cracking thud; the bullet dropping out of the sky with the vicious put-t of its two-thousand-pound impact against the rock. With the high whine of the slug the report cracked faintly without echo.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE SERPENT IN THE GRASS

ANNISTER, peering beneath his hand, saw from the dark line of pinons at the canyon's edge a faint whisp of smoke, ballooning upward in the still, silent air. Then, all along the trees there burst the rolling rattle of the reports.

In that eyrie, under the pitiless sun, they were beset now on all sides at once; the droning shriek of the high velocities streamed into the wind with, after a moment, yells, high, savage, like the fierce challenge of hounds in at the death.

Water they had none; food barely sufficient to last them, at half rations, till sundown; but of ammunition they had a-plenty. Annister had brought with him the rifles, .44-70's; he thrust the barrel of his gun outward now across the rock as in his ear he

heard the crash of the girl's weapon and a high-pitched answering yell.

Then, leaping his full length clear, a man, gun held high, burst up and outward from the boskage, to fall, in an aimless huddle of sprawling limbs, face downward upon the trail. And as if this had been a signal the staccato rattle of the rifles came with the tearing impact of the slugs; they thudded in from every angle as, all at once, running figures, stooping, fanned out from right to left.

Annister, emptying his rifle, pumping the gun with the speed and precision of machine-gun fire, vented a quick, explosive "Ha!" as, from right to left, his bullets found their marks.

At his side the girl, loading and firing with fingers steady as a rock, had scored once, twice, a thick-set fellow with the broad face of a breed, rolling and tumbling almost beneath the scarp. In a lull of the firing Annister could see his face with its snarling grin, frozen in death as, abruptly from the rock wall at their backs, there came a savage shout.

It rose high, exultant as, with a quick glance at his left, the operative found only empty space; the girl had gone. And then even as he leaped, turning to face this new danger threatening at their backs, he heard, punctuating that yell, the thunderous, long roar of a heavy Colt. It was the girl.

Annister saw the face, with its flat cheek-bones and wide grinning mouth, uprise above the bastion at their rear, saw the pistol in the huge, hairy hand rise, come down, hang for the tenth of a second above him against the sky. Then he saw the pistol in the girl's hand go out and up; it roared twice—and the grim face was blotted out. Her voice came high above the clang and rattle, silver-clear:

"We're holding 'em, partner! And we'll keep 'em that way! *Now!*"

Her pistol crashed as there came a high-pitched, strangled scream. Annister, his eyes about him all ways at once, upon that dark line of cover and the No-Man's Land that lay between, scowled in the bright sunlight, narrowing his gaze upon the dead and wounded just below.

The long shadows had become longer; with the setting of the sun he knew well enough that under cover of the night they would attack in force. And thinking of the girl, he felt for a moment his bones turn to water with the knowledge of that which was to come.

For himself he knew that he did not greatly care. His life, forfeit twenty times over, was—just a life—an infinitesimal, brief atom in the great scale of life and of death. But thinking of the girl, braver than a man, and yet, indeed, feminine and fine and true, he felt his heart sink, down and down and a weakness that was like death came on him in a sudden chill despair.

The firing had lessened now to single shots. Presently, however, all along their front it rose in a fresh fury, running in a quick, sudden burst, from right to left. Now at their left, and hidden from their view by a thick stand of spruce, there came a quick, sliding ripple, like the passage of a snake.

It was a human form. The jet eyes glittered as the half-naked body slowly and sinuously moved forward with scarcely a rustle of the grass.

Knife in his teeth, the sliding figure came onward, yard by stealthy yard, invisible beneath the bracken, face in a snarling, fixed grin above the great blade of the knife. Now the man came onward—up and up—until, halting in the dense shadow of a manzanita clump, his bare toes sought and found their purchase for the spring.

And behind him, and a little to his right, there showed all at once a second figure, full length, appearing suddenly as if out of the air; to the watchers in the boskage just below he was invisible, as was the first.

The two behind their barrier had not seen. Then all at once there came a scrambling rush, a thud, the slither of bare feet upon stone. Annister, whirling, beheld, too late, the fierce face with its flat cheek-bones and wide, grinning mouth. The Indian, great blade out-thrust for a moment, his muscles bunching for the spring, hung between earth and heaven; then he was inside.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### RAINBOW'S END

ANNISTER, his pistol out of reach, clubbing his rifle, swung it in a short arc. And then at a quick grunt from the Indian, he checked, halting the down-stroke in mid-air. For the brave, waving his dripping blade on high, held up his hand, palm outward, his thick speech like the hissing of a snake:

"Me Hualpai—amigo—ai!" he said. "Me catch-um snake-in-the-grass, you savvy?" He made a quick down-stroke with the knife, gesturing backward along the way which he had come. He grinned as, from the direction of the plain there came a quick flare of shots; then silence; then—and Annister heard it as man hearing a reprieve from death—a distant hoarse cheer.

In the revulsion of this sudden turn Annister, leaning against the wall, laughed, but the laugh was more a croak.

"Easley with help!" he said. "Thank God!"

And now, all round the mountain, with the roll and rattle of the reports, the long-riders, in their turn beset, swung to their saddles, spurring along the trail.

Westervelt, his high white sombrero shining in the sun, rode first; behind him, bending almost to the saddle-bow, came Rooker; even at that distance Annister fancied he could see the snarling grin as, streaking for the turn, he galloped away.

Bellies near earth, the cow-ponies whirled, back-jumping along the narrow way; dark faces grim, the long-riders, racing for the turn, were almost through; the deputies, flung in a wide circle, had not yet closed. Then, filling the narrow way, they came thunderous, the rattle of their carbines sharp above the swift thunder of the hoofs.

Caught between two fires, the long-riders wavered, came on; then they were whirled backward in the vortex of a cursing tangle of swift motion; the dust, billowing upward in a choking cloud, hung in the still air like a pall, out of which the red glare of the guns flashed and was gone, with the trampling of the hoofs, the oaths, the close, acrid reek of powder, with, over all, that drifting smoke-cloud eddying from less to less.

Westervelt was down, dying as he had lived; the Albino, carrying two deputies in his rush, had galloped clear. Then, even as they watched, the two on the cliff-face saw his horse rear, the rider pitch forward from the saddle even as out of the press came Rooker; his horse in a great leap had cleared the circle; in a moment he would be away.

Abreast the cliff-face, his face dark with hate, the bandit-leader flung out his hand; his gun roared even as the girl, with a tired sigh, leaned forward to slump downward against the wall.

But Annister, with a face like death, steadied the rifle downward across the rock. With the bandit's horse almost upon the turn, and rocketing forward in a sudden burst, he made a target dwindling from less to less. But as man flips a loose coin in air, Annister, almost without aim, as it had seemed, had fired.

The Indian, leaning outward from the scarp, yelled as, with the double report, horse and rider, as if blown backward by the impact of a giant hand, checked, halted—then somersaulted backward in a plunging fall. Allison Rooker, in the full measure of his sins, had gone to his account.

But Annister, shaken with the quick wind of his grief, turned now to the girl. Tender as any woman he lifted her, her head against his breast, his voice broken, in the quick tide of his passion and despair.

How like a broken lily she seemed! There in his arms, voiceless and pale, with never an answer to the words which, as if by some magic of love's desperate need might hold her there, to laugh, as it might be, at death.

The deputies were coming back; the fight was over; alone now for a brief interval together, and for the last time—ah, it would be the last time, and the first! He bent then, kissing the cold lips reverently, to hold her close for a moment in an agony of self-reproach.

"Partner!" he breathed.

And then, as if that kiss was magic, if the words were not, he saw, and believed not in

the seeing, the sudden flush; her eyes opened; her slim fingers, reaching, had touched his cheek.

Then, placing his hand on the crisp curls, she smiled.

"A scratch," she told him. "It will heal."

At a little distance, out of the tail of his eye, Annister could see the deputies, Easley in the lead. In a moment their moment would be over. In the grip of a strange, sudden, overmastering constraint, he stammered, halted, then with a strange hoarseness spoke:

"Will you—I know it's sudden—but—partner, can't we be——"

Abruptly he felt a contact that was like a burning snowflake upon his lips as, from the safe shelter of his arms he had his answer:

"Ah—partners—for always!" said the girl.

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## GAVE A FORGED CHECK

FRANK LANGHAN, 34 years old, a lieutenant colonel of the Twelfth Field Artillery during the war and said to be well known in Philadelphia, was arrested charged with attempting to purchase Liberty bonds worth $10,232.17 with a fraudulent certified check for that amount.

Langhan, his jaw broken by a detective of the Old Slip station, is in the prison ward at Bellevue. Two other men—Norman E. Stone, 24 years old, and Carl Dondo, 30, are also under arrest on forgery charges.

The last named pair were arraigned in the Tombs Court and held by Magistrate McQuade in $5,000 bail each for examination.

According to the police Langhan's jaw was broken after he had, while being booked in the Old Slip station, seized the check, torn it into bits and crammed the bits into his mouth. Detective James Fitzpatrick swung to the jaw as the simplest method of saving the pieces.

Langhan was arrested in the office of Spencer Trask & Co., bankers and brokers, at 25 Broad street, where he is alleged to have presented the check, which was drawn on the East River National Bank. Earlier he had telephoned Spencer Trask & Co. of his intention of purchasing the bonds.

Thomas F. Feeney, an executive of the company, remembered a recent case in which another firm had been victimized by the use of a bogus certified check and called up the East River National Bank.

A. J. Cerone, cashier of that instution, went at once to the office of Spencer Trask & Co. So did Police Lieutenant Dittmann and Detectives William Fay and James Fitzpatrick. When Langhan called for the bonds his check was shown to Cashier Cerone, who denied that the signature thereon was his. Langhan was then arrested on a forgery charge.

While Langhan was being questioned in the station the check was lying upon the desk. Unexpectedly he seized the check, tore it up and crammed it in his mouth. Fitzpatrick reached him first and knocked him down. The two detectives held him down and extracted the bits of paper. It took three hours to piece them together again.

Stone and Rondo were arrested after an investigation. The police say that they found two certified checks in Rondo's possession, one made out for $10,232.17 and the other for $10,400. The latter, according to the police, represented the amount of an account Stone has in the East River National Bank.

Langhan has been identified, according to the police, as the man who obtained $3,000 worth of Liberty bonds from the firm of Josephthal & Co. in a similar manner. Charles N. Nagle, a member of that firm, and who, the police say, made the identification, says Langhan was known to him as Bond.

[This story was broadcast by WJY]

# A Good Cigar

By JACK BECHDOLT

A TAXI swung up smartly alongside the curb before those small, red-brick houses that line New York's side streets.

Its driver descended from his seat and opened the cab door. He looked within and a grin spread over his face.

"All right, sir; here we are," he remarked, and added more briskly: "Come on, Colonel! All out. End of the line!"

Almost simultaneously the door of the house, which bore a neat brass plate announcing "Amos Brown, D.D.," swung open. A middle-aged and dignified gentleman hurried out, bareheaded. His close-cropped beard, the gleaming spectacles perched on his nose—everything about him—answered the description conjured up by the name on the conservative, dignified brass plate.

Amos Brown, D.D., and the driver of the taxi crowded into the cab and emerged bearing between them a stumbling human figure.

All these things were witnessed by Patrolman Tom Haley, who was rounding the nearest corner and had favored the little scene with the sharp, casual glance of a man who makes it his business to notice everything that happens on his beat.

Amos Brown, D.D., and the cab driver appeared to have their hands well filled with the person who had arrived in the cab. They clutched at and supported him, one on either side.

He was a fairly tall, fairly heavy man in quiet, modest clothing, wearing a cap which sat awry on his head at the moment and exposed a shock of ash-blond hair. His face was pallid and his eyes glazed and strangely fixed in their gaze. His arms and legs lacked all coordination and he sagged heavily in the embrace of his welcomers.

The observing eye of Tom Haley noted that two suit-cases and a bag were piled beside the cab driver's seat, and these pieces of baggage bore the large red and yellow labels of a trans-Atlantic steamship company.

Patrolman Haley had not previously met Amos Brown, D.D. Until recently the brick house had lacked a tenant.

He stepped up to the group. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

Doctor Brown answered him with a friendly smile.

"My friend's a little under the weather, as you can see," he began.

The blond man at this moment wheeled, fixing his glance on Haley with some difficulty, but holding it there steadfastly.

"Catamaran," he said thickly.

The ejaculation cost him a great effort. It was delivered solemnly, almost warningly.

"Eh?" said Haley.

"Cata—Catamaran," the helpless young man answered, or at least it sounded like that. His tongue was thick and his speech obscure.

Doctor Brown laughed easily. "My friend just landed from England on the *Berengaria*," he explained to Haley. "Evidently he's been celebrating his last day of freedom from the Volstead Act. You know how it is when a young man approaches

the home of the dry and the land of the great thirst!"

The young man furnished further confirmation by lurching abruptly at the patrolman, falling on him bodily.

"Here! Easy!" Haley admonished, beginning to grin.

"Catamaran!" said the young man solemnly. His glassy eyes fixed themselves on Haley's.

"Sure, that's a new name for it," Haley laughed good-naturedly. "I've heard it called moonshine and white mule and wildcat and greased lightning and this and that, but catama-what's-it's-name, that's something I never tasted at all."

"A catamaran is a sort of sailboat," Doctor Brown smiled. "I think he's got his wires crossed and is trying to tell you how he got here. Kind of a knock on the *Berengaria* to call her a catamaran."

"Friend of yours, Doctor?" Haley asked.

"Yes, indeed. Coming to spend a few months with me. I'll look after him all right." Doctor Brown signed to the taxi driver and they urged their burden to move.

But the young man halted stubbornly.

"Cop," he ejaculated profoundly. "P'lice!"

"That's all right, Buddy," said Haley soothingly. "I'll just give you an arm inside. You're not yourself. Sure, you haven't got your land-legs yet."

"Cop?" the young man asked. "Wait! Firs' American cop I've seen in months. Gaw bless 'em! Here!" He fumbled slowly at the breast pocket of his coat and drew forth a big cigar. It was a rather frayed cigar, but it looked tempting, a good cigar, thick and fat, bearing a world-famous label.

"Present!" the young man insisted, forcing the cigar on Haley. "Firs' American cop! Gaw bless 'em all!"

"Yes, take it, officer," Doctor Brown added. "I'd find you another if my hands weren't already too busy. Don't bother. We'll get him into bed. A rest is all he needs."

The young traveler was swung about, but he squirmed in their embrace to remark once more to Tom Haley, with the utmost solemnity and a ludicrous effort to be lucid, "Catamaran. Don't forget!"

Tom Haley had removed his uniform cap to stow the gift cigar in its band until after midnight, when regulations permitted his smoking it. "Sure, that's all right," he soothed. "I won't forget you, Catamaran. Thanks!"

Haley nodded to Doctor Brown and strolled on. From the corner of the street he noted the traveler and his baggage had been safely transferred within the house. The cab driver came out, lowered his meter flag and drove away.

Tom Haley enjoyed a good cigar. As he made his rounds methodically he thought several times of the young man's gift nestling in the band of his cap. He wished that midnight would come. After that hour strict police regulations relaxed. Patrolmen were permitted to smoke unobtrusively.

Once Haley was tempted to try the cigar anyway. He was on a quiet back street. Nobody would care.

He put the idea aside resolutely. It was against orders. And, besides, since the department had put on those little cruising tin lizzies that went bustling around bearing superior officers hither and yon, a man was never safe from being caught anywhere.

It lacked five minutes of twelve exactly when Haley saw Dr. Amos Brown for a second time. Haley knew him because he had been thinking of the cigar given him by the young man he dubbed "Catamaran."

The patrolman at the moment was within a block of Doctor Brown's brick house. The Doctor came hurrying down the street and, spying him from a distance, whistled and called to him. Haley strolled rapidly to meet him. "Yes?" he asked sharply, anticipating trouble.

"By George!" said Doctor Brown, a little breathlessly, "this is lucky! I came out looking for you especially."

"Something wrong?"

"Not in your line, Officer. Except—say"—his voice grew a little anxious—"say, you didn't smoke that cigar my friend gave you, I hope?"

"Not yet," said Haley. "I was just thinking about it."

"Something like a sigh of immense relief escaped Doctor Brown's lips. "Good enough!" he cried. His hand dove into an inner pocket and brought forth a fistful of cigars, and they looked excellent. Tom Haley eyed them with interest.

"Got that other cigar about you?" the Doctor asked.

"Sure!" Haley took off his cap and produced it.

"I'll trade you these for it?"

"What's the idea?" Haley grinned.

Doctor Brown looked chagrined. "That confounded idiot!" he exploded. "Look at that cigar he gave you! It's no good!"

Haley looked at the cigar. It felt unusually heavy in his hand. He noted that it was somewhat strangely rolled.

Doctor Brown burst out laughing. "It's one of those trick cigars," he explained. "You know that lowest form of practical joke? It burns about three or four minutes, then blooie, there's an explosion and a shower of roman candle stars, and you think somebody has thrown a bomb at you."

"Oh!" Haley said sheepishly. "Now that I look at it, it kind of gives itself away. I've been fooled that way once before."

"So have I," Doctor Brown grinned sadly. "Not half an hour ago. You see my young friend has a twisted sense of humor, especially if he happens to feel festive, as he did on returning to the States after so many years abroad. Give him a drink or two and he will think up the most confounded lowbrow jokes to play on a man! After I got him to bed I wanted a smoke and couldn't find my humidor. A couple of these cigars had fallen out of his clothes and I picked one up and lit it. Well—you know the rest! Then I happened to think of you. It's a darn shame to fool that officer, I thought. I'll run out and see if I can't save him in time. Why, man, I like to stay friends with the officer who protects my house and property! Here, take these in exchange and tomorrow morning I'll read the riot act to my kidding friend."

Doctor Brown forced the handful of cigars on Haley and the patrolman handed him the trick cigar. "Sure, you were very thoughtful to stop that joke," he protested.

"Why not?" said Doctor Brown frankly. "I want to stay on the right side of you! You patrol our streets. Well, I'm glad I was in time. Good-night, Officer."

"And how's Catamaran now?" Haley asked.

"Who?"

"Catamaran. The young fellow. Sure, I didn't get his name."

"Oh, yes, I see. He's sleeping like a baby. He'll probably wake up with a headache tomorrow. Serves him right. His name is Stone, by the way. Well, good-night."

"Good-night! And thank you kindly," Haley grinned, and added a salute.

There were six cigars in the bundle Doctor Brown handed him. Haley looked at the labels. Good brand. He smelled them. First-rate tobacco. He took off his cap and wondered how to stow away five cigars, leaving one to smoke at present.

His problem was partially solved by a glimpse of an old man who was strolling toward him. The man was a friend of Haley's, Ford Markman, a detective who practised unofficially. Haley had helped Markman on several cases, and Markman had often helped Haley.

Markman was an oldish man and sometimes a victim of sleeplessness. It was not unusual for him to stroll out about midnight when he was nervous or tired and take the air in Haley's company.

Also, Markman was very fond of a good cigar.

"Look here, Professor," Haley said, grinning, as he extended his handful of cigars. "Here's Santa Claus."

Markman smiled and selected a cigar. "Did you save a millionaire's son from kidnaping—or just rob a cigar-store?" he inquired with a twinkle in his little eyes.

"Sure, they were just handed me! A free gift. And orders and regulations forbid us to accept free gifts, so I'm trying to burn up the evidence," said Haley.

"Good Coronas," Markman commented. "You're lucky."

"A present from a young man named Catamaran," Haley grinned. "At least he's responsible for them."

"Catamaran, did you say? Funny name."

"It ain't his name," Haley explained. "But that was all he was able to say, being what you might call stewed or boiled at the moment."

Haley launched into a humorous description of the scene on the pavement before Doctor Brown's house.

Ford Markman stopped suddenly. His hand clutched Haley's arm tight. "Wait!" he commanded tensely. "Repeat that again."

Haley complied. "He shoved this cigar on me. 'Don't forget,' says he to me, 'Catamaran.' Then his friends shoved him into the house. Why, what's the matter now?"

Markman had whirled him about. "What house?" he demanded tensely.

"Doctor Brown's—just a couple of blocks over that way."

"Who is Doctor Brown?"

"A dentist. He just moved in two weeks ago."

"Describe him."

Haley described Doctor Brown as well as he could.

"I know it!" Markman cried. He started to walk rapidly in the direction Haley had indicated.

"What's up now?" Haley gasped, swinging along beside his friend.

"I don't know that anything is up. If it is, it's something big, Tom."

"Sure, but I can't see——"

"Tom," Markman puffed rebukingly, "did you read tonight's paper?"

"Sure I did."

"If you read it carefully you saw an item on the financial page that told of the arrival of one of the biggest diamonds in the world from Europe aboard the *Berengaria.*"

"Yes, I saw that. Said it was just bought by Parker, the big jeweler, for a Chicago millionaire's wife."

"Yes! And what was that diamond's name?"

"It's name? Why—why some foreign name; I forget now."

"If you ever make a detective you'll have to stop forgetting," Markman snapped severely. "It's name is The Kazatlan."

"Yeah! That was its name. And then what?"

"Just this: The Dr. Amos Brown you have described answers the description of a crook named Isidor LaTouche, known by many aliases. LaTouche is one of the smartest diamond thieves in the world."

"Well, Professor, I don't seem to make much out of it yet."

Markman snorted impatiently. "Tom," he said, "if La Touche has taken a house in this neighborhood under the name of Doctor Brown that alone is worth looking into. If, on top of that, you see La Touche taking charge of a young man apparently drunk—*or drugged*——"

"Drugged!" Tom interrupted. "Sure, I did think there was a funny odor about that drunk's clothes! Not exactly whisky; like——"

"And," Markman went on severely, "if that young man, helpless, keeps insisting on articulating one word to you—one very peculiar word—and that word sounds very much like a drunken or drugged man's attempt to say *Kazatlan*—well, if you see all that, I say it's worth investigating."

"Glory!" Haley cried. "I bet he stole that diamond off the young fellow with the souse!"

"Maybe," Markman admitted. "And here's another thing: doesn't it strike you a bit peculiar, now that you think of it, that Brown should go to all the trouble to hunt you up to trade cigars?"

"Sure, I can't make it out at all!" Haley puffed, his face screwing up with puzzlement. "How do cigars get into it?"

"Maybe we'll find out yet," Markman said dryly.

They paused before the little red-brick house.

Markman rang the doorbell.

The blinds were drawn and the rooms within apparenty dark. Doctor Brown evidently had retired for the night.

"Is there any way to get in—or out—of the back yard?" Markman asked in a cautious voice.

"Yes; wagon yard three doors up. And over back fences."

"Tom, you go around that way. Get into the house by the second floor, up over the porch—at the rear, you know. Do it quietly.

See what you can find, and listen for anything happening downstairs."

Tom nodded and turned away.

"Wait!" Markman added. "If you happen to meet Doctor Brown slipping out that way, get him. Get him at any cost—and watch him like a cat. Don't let him throw anything away. Understand?

Tom nodded and was gone.

Markman rang the bell again and knocked heavily.

He could hear a stirring within, and the door opened. Doctor Brown confronted him minus coat, vest, collar and tie, like a man who had dressed hastily. He rolled a big cigar in his mouth.

"Yes? What is it?" he inquired suavely. For Markman held one hand to his jaw. In a muffled voice he begged: "I've got to have help before I go mad. Ulcerated tooth, I guess."

Doctor Brown would have closed the door, but Markman's foot was in the way.

"My dear sir," he said, shocked, "I can't treat you at this time of night."

"But you're a dentist!" Markman pleaded. "You relieve pain. I am in agony."

The doctor hesitated and gave way grudgingly. "I'll look at it," he said, "but I can't do anything tonight. Come under the light."

Markman stepped in and closed the front door. "Let me offer you a light for your cigar, Doctor," he said courteously, reaching into his pocket.

"I don't want to smoke it," the doctor began his protest nervously. Then he stopped with a gulp.

Markman had brought forth, not a match but a pistol.

"Keep your hands up, please," he said mildly. "I'll trouble you for that cigar."

A crash, followed by a tinkling of broken glass, now came from the second floor.

Markman's hand snatched the cigar from Brown's mouth.

At the same moment Brown, heedless of consequences, leaped upon the detective and bore him down.

Markman's assailant was a powerful man. The detective was growing old. The fight was unequal.

Doctor Brown had Markman flat on the floor and his knee on his chest. He snatched—not at the pistol—but at his cigar. He wrested it from Markman's grip, leaped from him and snatched open the front door.

Then a blue cyclone evolved from the stairway leading upward to the second floor. It caught Doctor Brown before he had the door open, slamming the door shut again and flattening the fugitive against it.

Tom Haley had his man in handcuffs before Markman had regained his feet.

The Doctor's cigar had fallen to the floor. Markman picked up the frayed object and dropped it into his pocket after one brief glance.

"What did you find upstairs?" he asked.

"My friend Catamaran," Haley panted. "Gagged and lashed to a bedpost with about fifty feet of baling wire. I didn't stop to undo him when I heard your row."

Markman rubbed his head thoughtfully. "I'm glad you didn't," he grinned.

With the prisoner before them they went to the upper floor of the house. A glance showed them that the several bedrooms were unoccupied and unfurnished, the dust lying thick in them, all save one. In a rear room where a light burned they found the prisoner lashed to the bedpost.

Markman speedily began removing the gag and freeing the man's bonds. An exclamation from Haley interrupted him. "Look!" the patrolman said, pointing to a corner. "There it is! The Catamaran—or whatever you call it!"

A leather wallet had been tossed into the corner. Lying on it exposed was a diamond of large size and first water. Its facets sent forth multi-colored gleams.

The prisoner of the room, his jaws lame; his vocal cords almost paralyzed, gave a hoarse groan of dissent.

Doctor Brown said nothing.

Markman smiled and shook his head. "Paste," he said, after a glance. "Merely a duplicate." He took from his pocket the crumpled cigar, and showed it to the man he was unlashing. A smile that widened into a grin of relief answered the unspoken question.

Markman broke open the rolled tobacco leaves. Within, wrapped in a twist of paper, was the Kazatlan.

The blond young man, his stiffened muscles relaxed, refreshed with water, was now able to tell his tory.

"My name is Morgan," he said. "Parkers, the jewelers, sent me to Paris to bring back the Kazatlan for our Chicago customer. News of the sale of the gem had been published. We expected trouble. I had this paste duplicate made to carry in my wallet for possible thieves, and put the real diamond in the cigar that always remained in plain view in the breast pocket of my coat.

"I could not discover that anybody on the *Berengaria* knew of my mission. I see now that there was no crook shadowing me. They used a smarter trick.

"After I landed and got through customs, I concealed the diamond again as before and hailed a taxi, thinking my errand was safely done. In the cab I became unconscious. Gas of some sort, I suppose. Its effect was like a dentist's laughing gas, something that wore off rapidly. As soon as I was in the air before this house I could think clearly enough, but my tongue was thick and my body almost helpless still. I managed to get the patrolman to take the cigar before they rushed me inside and began searching me. When this man who calls himself Doctor Brown——"

"And is La Touche," Markman supplied.

"Yes. When he discovered the duplicate was paste, and that I had no diamond concealed about me, he rushed out of here. He must have guessed it was in the cigar I gave the policeman."

"And now we must get that taxi driver," Markman cried. They hurried their prisoner to the police station and captured the chauffeur that night. Convicted, La Touche and his accomplice went to jail.

But it was many months before Tom Haley could accept a gift cigar without the liveliest suspicions.

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## CAUGHT A SUSPECT

WHILE funeral services for Patrolman John J. Hyland, slain by gunmen while on duty at Bedford avenue and Empire Boulevard, Brooklyn, were being held at St. Patrick's church, the man thought to be the slayer was being questioned by detectives at Police Headquarters. He had been arrested in the lobby of the Hotel Astor after a chase following a hold-up of a restaurant at Ninth avenue and Forty-fifth street.

At Police Headquarters he said he was Peter Matrangulo, nineteen years old, a printer. With a confederate he is alleged to have entered the Newport restaurant, intimidated the employees with revolvers, lashed Nicholas Condulas, night manager, to a chair and robbed the cash register.

The attention of Patrolman John J. Crehan, of the West Forty-seventh street station, was attracted to the men when Condulas staggered from the restaurant trailing behind him the chair to which he was tied. Crehan chased the men along Ninth avenue. Matrangulo separated from his companion, fled eastward on Forty-fifth street and south in Eight avenue to Forty-fourth street, along which he sped, taking refuge in the lobby of the Hotel Astor, with Crehan in close pursuit.

As Matrangulo darted through the Forty-fourth street entrance of the hotel Crehan called on him to stop and fired four shots. Hundreds of people concentrated on the spot from all directions while the windows of the hotel were filled with excited guests in scanty attire. Matrangulo, who sought to lose himself among those gathered in the lobby, was singled out by Crehan and arrested. He was identified by Condulas, who had followed the chase dragging the chair.

# *The* Trap of the Spider

By MILES OVERHOLT

BILLY MASON needed only two things to make him contented—a good square meal and some buttons on his coat. And one was as far away as the other.

Billy had been out of these two luxuries for so long that he had almost come to the belief that there were no fairies any more and certainly no Santa Claus.

There was snow on the ground and frost in the air, and it looked to Billy Mason like a fine night for a hold-up—except that he never had held up anybody, and he hated to make the effort, anyway. Besides, he had been taught that robbery was a low form of crime.

He trudged along the street trying to make his lips pucker into a careless whistle when he passed any one. But he didn't fool many.

Somehow his feet refused to take him far away from the park benches; so that he wandered more or less in a circle.

Billy could not know that a man attired in a rich fur coat, warm gloves and other anti-cold apparel had been watching him for the last half-hour. Had Billy been told that he had a guardian angel he would have scoffed at the idea.

Satisfied at last, the "good angel" approached Billy Mason.

"Could you use a dollar, my man?" a heavy voice interrupted his parade.

"If you're talking to me, say it again," grinned the derelict. "If not, please make signs so I can understand you."

"I say, could you use a dollar?" the big man in the fur coat repeated, coming closer to Billy.

"Brother, you said it!" replied the young man. "I could use a dollar in more different ways right now than a juggler. But if it is only information you're after I bid you a very good-evening."

He turned to go, but the older man stopped him.

"Wait, here's the dollar," he said.

Billy's hand came from his pocket so fast that the blood almost started to circulating in it again.

"Thanks, terribly," he said. "And to what and to whom am I indebted for this act of kindness?" he wondered.

"Here is my card," the philanthropist answered. "Come to my office at about eleven tomorrow morning. I think I may be able to find a job for you. Good-night!"

Billy watched the big man make his way to a waiting automobile that stood near by, the chauffeur rigid and haughty; then he hurried over across to the avenue, where a hot supper could be purchased for a quarter.

As he sipped his coffee Billy took his benefactor's card from his pocket and read:

"Jacob Wahl, Diamonds, 320 Grace Ave."

"H'm! No wonder he's rich," mused the young man. "But why did he pick on me, I wonder? There were dozens of others as hungry looking as I scattered all around the park. I wonder!"

But he appeared, freshly shaven and with buttons on his coat, at the diamond dealer's office at eleven the following morning.

Wahl, Billy found, was a fat, oily, sleek-looking person, with a large nose and a pudgy hand which he seemed to employ mostly for slapping folks on the back. Even the clerks were not immune.

Wahl came right to the point with Billy. He was that kind of a man, he said—blunt and straight from the shoulder.

"I employ from ten to fifteen men who

are on the road a great deal of the time delivering jewels or bringing them from some place. I buy unusual gems from persons who are temporarily out of funds," he said. "I have agents in every city in the country. I do not trust the express companies or the mails. I trust men!"

Billy Mason marveled at this. Wahl, he thought, must be a psychologist—a faddist who liked to carry his fad to extremes.

"There is a reason for this," the big man went on. "Five times I have lost a small fortune by the common method of transportation. I swore long ago that I would deal in humanity rather than mechanics, and I have proved to my own satisfaction that men—individuals—are safer, more to be depended upon, than an institution."

"But how——"

"Let me finish," the dealer stopped him. "You were going to ask why you were selected as a candidate. Is it not true?"

"Well, it would have amounted to that," smiled Billy.

"I size my man up before approaching him, just as I followed you for nearly an hour last evening," said Wahl. "I am a student of human nature in all its reactions. I never fail in my judgment. I want you to pay attention for a few moments and answer my questions."

"Go ahead," said Billy Mason.

"Have you any relatives in the city? A sweetheart? A close companion?"

"No, to all three," answered the young man.

"That is much in your favor. Do you care to undertake the task of transporting thousands of dollars' worth of precious stones about the country for me? Could you withstand the temptation to steal them?"

"I think I would rather like the opportunity," replied Billy. "I know that I would not be tempted to take the jewels so long as I were in your employ—or at any other time. I have certain—er—scruples about thievery."

"One other question: Would you mind having your life insured for, say, ten thousand dollars in my favor? This to protect me in case anything—er—in case of your sudden demise, by accident or otherwise?"

"Certainly I have no objections," smiled Billy. "It sounds perfectly reasonable to me."

"Then, if you pass the insurance test, and promise me that you will not mention your business to any one, or by whom you are employed, I think I may safely say that you're hired," smiled Wahl, slapping the young man on the back.

The big man handed Billy a fifty-dollar bill.

"You get yourself some clothes and come back here at four o'clock this afternoon and take your physical examination," he said. "I have an important errand for you as soon as we can make arrangements."

And now, thoroughly believing in fairies, Billy Mason went out upon the street and grinning in the face of a biting blizzard.

Jacob Wahl a few hours later knocked at the door of a little house on West Sixteenth street and was admitted by a red-eyed, pale-faced woman.

He took her hand and gently stroked it.

"I grieve for you, Mrs. Jenkins," said the philanthropist. "Your husband was a faithful employee and an honest, upright citizen. He must have been a loving husband. What can I do for you?"

He took a chair and fixed his eyes on the frail little widow.

"I—I—don't know," said Mrs. Jenkins, the tears coming to her eyes in spite of herself. "The—the funeral was held yesterday, and I looked through all Joe's papers today, but could find no insurance policy. I—I—guess he left me penniless."

"That is what I feared," said Jacob Wahl. "That is why I have come to you today—to see if you required financial assistance."

"I—I—have only two dollars left, after paying the funeral expenses," wept the woman. "The rent is paid only to the fifteenth—two weeks away. I don't know what I am going to do."

"Have you any folks in the city—or anywhere around?" asked the big man.

"I have a sister in Denver," replied Mrs. Jenkins. "I could go to her till—till—I got my strength back; but I haven't the means."

"Tut! Tut! That's what I'm here for—to provide the money for you to go wherever you think best," said Jacob Wahl. "Here!" He unstrapped a wallet and took some bills from its folds. "Here's five hundred dollars. Will that help you?"

"Oh, Mr. Wahl! How can I ever thank you!" cried the woman, weeping afresh. "Why, it—it's more money than I ever had in my life! Help me? It will save my life!"

"There! There! Don't thank me!" exclaimed the philanthropist. "It's little enough for me to do, I assure you. I am only too happy to be of some slight help to you. Now, when will you start West?"

"As soon as I can pack up," replied the widow. "Tomorrow evening, perhaps."

"That's fine," said Wahl. "I will send my car to take you to the station. Here—phone me when you are ready."

He handed her his card, squeezed her hand once more, and went out.

"The trouble was with Jenkins—he talked," mused Jacob Wahl as he was driven down the street. "A married man has no business doing secret work. He says a word to his wife and a dozen persons know it in a day. Wives are dangerous. All women are dangerous. No more married men for me."

The car halted at an office-building and Jacob Wahl went inside and up to the top floor.

The insurance broker smiled wryly at his appearance.

"Well, I guess we're stuck this time," he said, as Wahl handed him a folded policy. "Our representative in Chicago tells us that your man was beaten to death with a gas-pipe, or some heavy instrument, and that the police are plumb clueless. Looks like all we can do is to pay. But I'm going to raise the rates on you, old-timer. That's the second in a year. We've got to dope out a new kind of policy to take care of that kind of business."

"Yes, it is hazardous—especially so," admitted the diamond dealer. "Seems to me that you fellows should get together and frame a new policy just for that sort of thing—all of you. To be quite frank about it, I've had more than your two cases lately, and I've lost heavily, too; for, of course, each time the murderers got away with the jewels."

"Sure, I understand that. But you're not the loser, at that. You insure the jewels and your man, too. Looks to me like you're ahead of the game," said the insurance broker.

"That's where you are wrong," returned Jacob Wahl. "As you know, I never can get full value on the gems; then oftentimes I have an extra consignment, uninsured. Altogether, I'm considerably the loser."

"Why don't you try the mails or express?" wondered the insurance man.

"I have—to my regret—and lost," sighed Wahl. "Besides, in most cases mine is a personal business—man to man—see? I have to employ men."

"I know you give a lot of money away, too," the broker said. "Your philanthropy is well known. Well, I guess we'll have to draw the check."

He went into another office, returning a few minutes later with a check for $10,000.

Wahl took the expensive strip of paper.

"Want any more of my business?" he asked, slipping the check into his wallet.

"Well, I can't very well turn it down," admitted the broker. "My company hasn't kicked yet, and I get the commission just the same. Bring on the victim."

"Don't say victim!" admonished the diamond dealer. "It sounds too—er—gruesome. Er—send your examiner over to my office at 5 o'clock. I've got a good man now. You'll make some money on him."

"That's me," smiled the agent. "He'll be there."

Jacob Wahl entered his car and was driven back to his place of business, a smile playing about his pudgy features.

"It's just naturally too good to be true," said Billy Mason to himself as he donned his new clothing. "Things aren't being done that way, and pretty soon I'm going to wake up out there on one of those benches in the park."

He went to the window and looked out.

It was snowing. He tried on his new overcoat, cheap but serviceable.

"All my life," he continued his monologue, "I've had to go after what I wanted; nobody ever before came and slipped me anything but hard luck. Wahl's business is fishy, that's what."

He made his way luxuriously down the street toward Jacob Wahl's place of business.

"If that guy slaps me on the back twice more I'm gonna crown him," he grinned to himself. "Naw, not that—not till after I get my first week's check, anyway. Gosh, this job is soft. Nothing to do but travel in style and wear good clothes. I hope I'll never wake up."

Jacob Wahl met him at the door, hand outstretched—the other one slapping him on the back. But Billy had on his overcoat, and that helped some.

"You're a little ahead of time. That's what I like to see—punctuality, plus," beamed the diamond dealer. "The examiner will be here at five. Then we will get down to business."

"Am I to start somewhere at once?" asked the young man.

"Yes, if everything is O. K.," answered Wahl. "I have a very important errand for you. I must send fifty thousand dollars' worth of gems to a woman in Detroit. She has insisted that I send a representative from the establishment so that she may examine them to see that they are as we promised they would be—properly set and all. You will take them to her, let her inspect them, accept her check, which must be certified, and return."

"Whew! It that all?" asked Billy.

"What! You're not afraid of the task?"

"Oh, no; it isn't that. It was just the fortune I was thinking of—the way you speak of fifty-thousand-dollar deals."

"Oh, that's a mere pittance," smiled Jacob Wahl. "I mean that we transact business like that every week. By the way, you know, of course, why I asked if you had relatives or friends here?"

"Well, I guessed it was because you wanted me to keep my mouth shut, but I am not certain why."

"You must know that if certain crooks knew that you were carrying fifty thousand dollars' worth of jewels they would waylay you, take them from you, perhaps kill you."

"Oh, sure," said Billy. "I understand that."

"That is why I want your life insured—why the jewels are heavily insured. We must protect ourselves, you know."

"Of course."

The medical man arrived after a while, and Billy passed with a bang.

"I can't find a thing the matter with you," smiled the physician. "I believe you are about the finest specimen I have examined in a year."

Jacob Wahl beamed.

"Fine!" he exulted. "The application is all made out, and there is a check accompanying it in this envelope." He handed the papers to the examiner. "Tell Walton to make it snappy. I'm paying the premium for a year."

Then as the insurance man left Wahl turned to Billy Mason.

"Here's a hundred dollars. Go buy a ticket to Detroit. Say nothing to any one. Return here at 9. Your train leaves at 9:30. The gems will be ready, together with instructions and money to defray expenses. Remember, caution is the word."

"Yes, that's one word—and I know a lot more of 'em that can be used to advantage on this trip," smiled Billy Mason.

No one followed him when he bought his ticket, so far as he could observe; no one jostled him at the window; nothing marred the calm serenity of the enterprise. It was all too prosaic for William J. Mason, Esq.

Promptly at 9 o'clock he knocked at the door of Jacob Wahl's office and was immediately admitted, the face of the diamond dealer still beaming, and a fat hand lurking back in a sleeve ready to pound upon Billy's back.

"You have the ticket? Good!" Wahl went to a huge safe near his desk and took out a package.

"Here you are—all sealed and in compact shape. And here are your instructions.

Read and memorize them, then burn the paper."

Billy took the instructions and read:

"You will arrive in Detroit at 10:30 in the evening. You will go immediately to the Drexel Hotel and register under your own name. Our client has been informed of your coming, your name and where you will stop in Detroit. Her name is Amelia Barndollar. She will get in touch with you the morning after your arrival at 10 o'clock. If not, you are to remain at the hotel until she calls you by telephone. If you do not hear from her by noon of the second day, take a taxicab to 876 Jarmuth avenue, her residence, send in your card, a package of which are in the envelope from which you took these instructions, and insist upon seeing her. She is sometimes indisposed and, possibly, may fear to call upon you at the hotel. She is very peculiar, but has all her faculties. You are to bring back with you a certified check made in favor of Jacob Wahl for $50,000, after she has convinced herself that the jewels are satisfactory. But under no circumstances are the jewels to get out of your sight. Inclosed in this envelope are three one-hundred-dollar bills. They are for your expenses. You may return all that you do not require to successfully carry out your mission."

Billy tore up the paper, after fixing all the details in his mind, including the name and address of the purchaser, stuffed the money in his pocket and grinned.

"All right," he said. "Let's go."

Wahl slapped him on the back as he went out of the door and into a biting gale that nearly swept him off his feet.

Instinctively Billy had taken an upper berth. Somewhere he had read that they were safer. Logic told him that, too. He parked his jewel-box under his pillow next to the window and found it still there in the morning.

The Drexel Hotel he found was not among the first-class houses. He wondered why he had been sent there. Probably at the whim of the eccentric buyer of the gems, he thought, finally.

Then, after registering as instructed, he sought his room, washed, came out, locked his door, kept the key in his pocket and went to another hotel to spend the night. He feared foul play.

By the time the street-cars were running next morning Billy Mason was strolling along Jarmuth avenue looking for No. 876.

He waited until 9 o'clock before ringing the bell. A sleepy maid came to the door.

"Pardon me, but I have just moved in a couple of doors down the street," he said to the girl, smiling his most expansive smile, "and I was told that a doctor lived at this number. My wife has been taken suddenly ill, and I have to have a physician."

"Why, no, there is no doctor here," said the maid sympathetically.

"No? That's strange," said Billy, trying to look disappointed. "Why, I was told that Doctor Barndollar resided here. Yes, this is the number."

"Nobody by that name here at all," informed the maid. "This is Mr. Sprecher's house, and the family has lived here for ten years."

"Aren't there any Barndollars in the neighborhood?" queried Billy.

"Not that I know of," returned the maid. "But I'll ask Mrs. Sprecher. She'll know."

"Never mind," said the young man. "I'll be running along to a telephone. Thanks just the same."

He ran down the steps, hurried along the street to a corner and took a car back to town, a broad grin overspreading his worthwhile features.

"It looks to me—I don't know why—
But it looks to me like a gosh-dinged lie!"

He hummed the tune softly as the car sped onward, thereby irritating the nearby passengers, but he did not notice them. He was busy with several important thoughts.

He wondered what it was all about. But the grin came from the satisfaction he felt in proving his guess correct in two instances. He was looking forward to the next chapter. It was going to be interesting, he felt sure.

The banks were opening their doors when he reached the city's business thorough-

fares. He sought one, rented a deposit-box and tossed his box of jewels into it. Then he felt easier.

Before returning to his room at the Drexel Hotel Billy Mason made a purchase at a pawn-shop. He arrived at the room at thirteen minutes past ten. There had been two telephone calls, the clerk informed him.

"I'll be in to anybody all day," was the word he left at the desk.

His telephone was ringing when he unlocked the door to his room.

"That's what I like—punctuality," he chuckled, as he took down the receiver. And he was not surprised to hear a woman's voice.

"William J. Mason speaking," he said clearly.

"Oh, yes, to be sure," the woman's voice came to him. "Well, this is Amelia Barndollar. Could I see the—er—merchandise you brought with you from Mr. Wahl right away?"

"Surely," replied Billy. "Were you coming to the hotel?"

"Yes; but if you don't mind I should like to bring my nephew with me—we would have to come to your room, you know."

"To be sure. Why, yes, bring him. I shall be glad to have him accompany you," he said without a qualm. "How soon will you be here?"

"Oh, we're downstairs now. We'll be right up."

"Right," said Billy, wondering if he had guessed wrong after all. To make more certain that he hadn't he went over to the bed and lifted up the mattress and peered behind it. It was as he expected—the string which he had attached to the springs and thence to the mattress had been broken. Some one had lifted it up. He found also his strings in the dresser drawers.

"Amateurs! Rank amateurs!" he scoffed, as he turned to answer the knock on the door.

A heavily veiled woman and a large, ruddy-faced man entered. Billy placed them in chairs near the window. He sat on the bed near the head, one hand under the edge of a pillow, in careless attitude.

"I am Mrs. Barndollar," the woman said. Then she introduced her nephew, George Stevens.

"Now shall we take a look at the diamonds?" the woman asked.

"Surely—as soon as I have satisfied myself that you are the person with whom I am to deal," smiled Billy.

"I hope you have no reason to doubt my word. You were instructed—you—Mr. Wahl made no mention of any such proceedings on your part. I was merely to call——"

"To what instructions do you refer?" asked Billy. "I have no instructions. Have you any means of identifying yourself? You see, I have to be careful. This is my first trip——"

"Aw, can that stuff!"

Billy flashed a glance at the big nephew who was half out of his chair, his hand at his hip pocket. A pistol flashed out from the pillow at the head of the bed.

"Put 'em up!" Billy ordered, covering the pair.

The woman gasped. The man's hand slowly came away from his pocket.

"Up with 'em!" snapped Billy. "No fooling. I let a gun go off accidentally once."

Four hands reached ceilingward.

"This—this is an outrage!" cried the woman hoarsely. "I shall see that your employer hears of this—by wire."

Billy grinned.

She continued her tirade, her voice rising higher and higher, and Billy, fearing to attract the attention of roomers, attempted to quiet her. The man sprang forward, striking his arm, and all but knocking the pistol from Billy's grasp.

Before Billy could regain his equilibrium the big man was upon him, wrenching at the revolver. The woman leaped nimbly forward and aimed a vicious kick at his head, which missed, and Billy managed to shake off the big man just as the woman extracted a pistol from the folds of her dress.

Firing without taking aim, Billy nearly scored a bullseye. The bullet tore the revolver from the woman's hand, and that

gave the pair some pause. They were up against a fighting man.

The nephew changed his mind about seeking his own pistol when Billy pointed his gun in his direction, and again his hands sought the ceiling.

"Madam," said Billy, turning slightly toward the woman, "you flatter me, and I thank you for doing me the compliment of thinking that your 'nephew' required physical assistance in this transaction. I'm here to state that you are the best man of the two."

"Is this a hold-up?" half shrieked the woman.

"Well, no," admitted Billy Mason. "To tell you the truth, I don't know what to call it. Sit down and make yourselves comfortable."

He motioned them to their chairs, first removing the "nephew's" pistol from his hip-pocket with the words: "This gun seems to disturb your equanimity."

"Now, let's see if we can't get together on some sort of common ground," went on the young man, smiling again and picking up the woman's pistol from the floor.

"Seems to me," he went on, "that your boss overlooked a great number of details. He didn't tell 'em to me, anyway. Suppose you tell 'em."

Then, as they remained silent:

"No? Well, I guess I'll have to let you tell 'em to the judge. I'm sorry."

He started toward the telephone. The woman gasped again. The man started to say something, coughed. Billy went on—backwards, the revolver steady and determined.

"Wait." It was the man speaking. Billy stopped.

"Well?"

"What do you want? What's the game, anyway?" asked the "nephew."

"I? Why, I don't want a thing. And there is no game, so far as I am concerned," replied Billy. "Is that all you want to know?"

"You haven't anything on us," the woman replied. "Go on—go as far as you like."

"O. K.," said Billy, taking down the receiver.

"Wait." Again it was the man's voice.

"Outside, please," they heard him say to the operator.

"Don't call the police," the woman's voice was pitched in a high key. "We'll tell you what you want to know."

"That's better," chuckled Billy, hanging up. "Let's go."

He resumed his seat at the head of the bed.

"Before we start, I am going to enlighten you a bit so that you will be less apprehensive," he said. "First, I am not a detective. I have nothing on you, as you say. I want nothing. I don't even want to see you arrested. I'm only a suspicious egg who thought things were breaking too good for me, and, therefore, everything that has happened within the past three or four days appeared sinister and dangerous. In other words, I've been playing a hunch."

Then he told them how and where Wahl found him, the offer of a job—everything.

"I was suspicious of this hotel, so I stopped somewhere else after registering here," he continued. "I was suspicious of the woman buyer, and I went out to the Barndollar address early this morning and had my suspicions confirmed—there never has been a Mrs. or Miss Barndollar at the address Wahl gave me. That was a silly error on his part."

"Not so silly," said the woman. "He didn't expect that you would get that far. You were to have been taken care of last night, but you weren't here.'

"I see," grinned Billy. "But I still don't get the drift. I knew that, somehow, I was in danger, else he would not have been so particular about getting my life insured in his favor before sending me out. But what is it?"

"What happens to us after you have learned what you want to know?" queried the man.

"Search me. Do as you like," said Billy. "I don't want you."

"Is that a promise?" asked the woman.

"Absolutely," replied Billy.

"But what about Wahl? Do you intend

making trouble for him?" wondered the man.

"No; only to tear up that insurance policy," grinned Billy. "I don't want him to benefit any by my death—not that spider."

"Well, then, Wahl's graft is murder—that's all, plain and fancy murder," said the "nephew." "The jewelry business is a stall—a means to an end. He employs healthy young men—usually unmarried ones—to deliver jewelry, insures them, as well as the jewels, then notifies one or two of his men, and they do the rest."

Billy sat for a while in silent thought, following the recital. Then he said:

"I'm trying to digest all this. Why do you tell me this story? If it is the truth why didn't you lie to me right off—tell some other plausible yarn? What I mean is, it doesn't seem possible that one crook would squeal on another this way. That is why I don't believe you now. It isn't natural."

"That's true," the woman spoke up. "But in this case Jim happens to be telling you the truth. You see, Wahl double-crossed us the last time we—on a previous deal. We intended to take the jewels this time and call it square with him. But we would rather give him a scare—since you say he is to be unharmed—than to let him get away with the other graft. We can frighten him into paying us what he owes us now."

"Go to it," said Billy. "More power to you. I wonder how many poor duffers have been sent to their death by Wahl?"

"Perhaps ten—maybe twenty," said the man. "But he picked the wrong man in you. He has collected many an insurance policy in the past four years. But he's slick, I'll say that."

"But you two—you don't act like ordinary murderers," went on Billy. "I can't believe you would deliberately kill any one for money."

"Of course not," said the woman. "That was to have been taken care of—in your case—by a 'night man.'"

"What about the jewels? I suspect that most of them are phoney, are they not?" demanded Billy.

"No, they're the real articles, all right," informed the man. "You see, they are sealed by the insurance company, the box is locked by them, and the key mailed by them to the recipient, whose name is given them by Wahl. In your case, of course, the key went to our address. It had not yet arrived this morning."

"Well," said Billy, rising, "I guess that's all. I may state in passing that the jewels are now in a safety-deposit box at one of the banks. I shall take them back to Mr. Wahl, telling him that they could not be delivered because he gave me the wrong address. I will mention nothing of this meeting. You may do as you please about the matter."

They went out of the room.

Billy Mason followed shortly, stopping at a telegraph office on his way to the bank to send a message. It was addressed to Jacob Wahl and was to the effect that the jewels could not be delivered because of improper address, and that he was on his way back.

But the telegram that the man and woman sent was much longer and more to the point. Decoded, it read:

"Mason knows all. He is a detective. We can stop his mouth for $50,000. Send it at once, or we turn him loose. He furnished us with much valuable information against you—enough to hang you fifty-two times."

It was the woman who figured out the blackmail idea. As Wahl often said, a woman of any kind is dangerous.

Billy Mason stopped over in Chicago between trains and to visit an old friend, which is why he did not return the jewels in person. The newspapers furnished him with a reason. The item which attracted his attention stated that Jacob Wahl had committed suicide in his office after having received two or three telegrams. Billy's had been the last one to arrive. In it he had said he was on his way back.

"I knew it!" ejaculated Billy to himself, as he prepared to mail the box of jewels back to Jacob Wahl's shop. "It was too good. Nobody ever hands me anything—unless it is a bomb."

# $250 Reward

By M. H. ASHMAN

I LAY on my comfortless iron bed—it had three castors, a block of wood serving for a fourth—and again surveyed my dingy room. Surely in a lovely Southern city and in a clime like ours there was something better for a girl than an ugly room in an unfriendly boarding-house!

Turning my back, figuratively, on my cheerless surroundings, I picked up the Sunday morning paper I had just dropped. It was the *Daily Opinion,* on which I was the one woman "cub" reporter, and I was struck afresh by the possibilities I had sensed in an "ad" in the Lost and Found column. It ran thus, in display type:

"$250 reward for return of lady's purse left in haste outside grocery, corner Broad and Valence streets, Monday night. Finder may keep $50 in purse. No questions asked if returned to 2000 St. Helena street.

What had particularly fixed my attention was the fact that in this, the second insertion in three days, the reward had been raised from $50 to the sum here mentioned. Some urgency there! Well, from any standpoint I needed money and suddenly it had darted across my mind that here might be a chance for a little amateur detective work. The purse had not been found up to this morning. Maybe I could find a clue. My ability to "find" things, from grandpa's spectacles to a job for dad, had been a standing family joke. At the worst there was the other chance—of a good story for my paper, and so helping myself that way. I made a careful study of the advertisement once more.

It was a valuable purse—to be used in marketing! Was there a purse alone worth that in the city? It would have to be made of very precious material, indeed, to be worth $300. Yet without the money what was left? The purse. An every-day marketing purse would not be made of that material. Then came my first swift conclusion. The reward had been put up because there was something valuable besides money in the purse! My second deduction was that "something" was not mentioned for a reason—*a very special reason!*

Hastily I summed up the possible contents. Checks, cards, policies, titles to properties or even samples of dress goods and recipes for cake! I discarded them all as being incompatible with any need for secrecy. A photograph, a prized souvenir, a lock of hair—sentimental reasons! To be sure, there might be a jewel, say a ring, of value, but why not speak of it? A letter that should not have been written? Ah, now, as the children say, I was getting "warm"!

But the address of the loser was given in full! No suggestion of anything surreptitious there, I reflected with disappointment. "Return to 2000 St. Helena street." I jumped up and began to dress. I'd go to that number and see if there wasn't something in it for me.

I put on my hat—not too good-looking at that—and a white sweater over my dark dress, for a hint of our mild winter lingered in the March day. The mirror showed me that the excitement had sent a rather becoming color to my usually pale cheeks and that the natural curl in my reddish-gold hair was more "wavy" than its wont. "Electrical disturbance," I thought, amused by the idea and by the new "flash" in my dark blue eyes. I wanted and needed every sign of "pep." Then I went out and took a trolley crossing St. Helena street.

In fifteen minutes I was passing up the steps of a handsome house of colonial type to the white-columned "gallery." The street was virtually deserted, every one, I assumed, being at church. I lifted a beautiful old brass knocker. As I let it fall it seemed to ring out hollow against an empty interior. That was pure fancy, of course! It would sound the same if the place were filled with furniture. No response. I lifted and let it fall again more heavily. I waited a few minutes, then walked to the end of the gallery and saw that it extended around and down one side of the house. I followed it a few steps and found myself close to a shuttered window. I glanced cautiously around. Only a wide open lot on this side. No one in sight anywhere. Everything about the house was fresh and charming. Wisterias covered this end of the porch with a purple veil. Roses smiled up at me everywhere. There was not a sound anywhere.

Pressing my face close against the shutters, whose slats stood wide apart, I was able to see into the room and to the one beyond. Both were absolutely bare! Not a rug, not a stick of furniture, in either. I returned to the front gallery and went down the steps to the sidewalk. By not finding anything I was convinced I had come across something worth finding—a mystery of several carats weight in value!

The sun was high above the long vista of magnolias and palms ahead of me. It rather dazzled me, and I walked with my head down, thinking. I looked up at the sound of footsteps and noticed dimly that a man was approaching. As he came closer I saw him drop an object into his pocket. To my eyes, full of the sunlight, it looked like a long, brown leather purse! He threw me a smiling glance out of dark, merry eyes as he passed. I moved on slowly—stopped—looked back. He was disappearing into the door of No. 2000!

My whole admirably constructed castle of speculation fell with a crash. Also my hopes. Of course he was the owner of the purse, going into his own house. No mystery, no interview, no "story" for me!

Yet something stubborn in me balked at the thought. All my guesses were purely hypothetical. Why should a man go marketing? With such a purse? I ignored the fact that men did go to the store at Broad and Valence streets every Monday—or any other night. And the mystery was still unsolved. Anyhow, there was still an opportunity to get a spicy paragraph for the *Opinion*. I'd get it or perish in the attempt. I retraced my steps.

A woman was going into the nearest house as I approached 200. I stopped.

"I beg your pardon, but can you tell me whether that house"—indicating it with a gesture—"is occupied?" I shamelessly added: "I understand it is to be sold."

"No, it is not occupied at present. It is Judge Barton's old place. It's not on the market, to my knowledge."

"Thank you!" I was about to go on when the lady added:

"I forgot. There is a young man rooming there now, I believe. A friend of the family, I fancy. He may be able to give you the information." Again I thanked her and continued my walk.

Now what? Nothing was changed that I could see, except that the purse had presumably been found and returned to the owner or to some one acting in her place. Everything absolutely commonplace! No, not quite. Some parts of the puzzle remained; indeed, the whole groundwork of the ad. was unexplained. Why such a reward for such an apparently trivial article? I turned and went back to No. 2000.

My heart missed several beats as I lifted the old brass knocker once more. Its echoing thud sent a tiny shiver through me. Plainly I was scared. I drew myself up to my best stature, pulled my hat a bit farther over my eyes, and waited.

But only a minute. Swift, masculine footsteps came along the hall and the door was flung hospitably wide open. My gentleman of the merry eyes stood there.

"Why, good-morning!" As if I'd been an old friend dropped down on him unexpectedly. "Come in, will you?"

I fear I blinked—coming in out of that fiercely blinding sun. But I marshaled my professional forces and manner and said:

"Thank you. Just a moment—in the hall here."

He laughed—such a *good* sort of laugh—and, with a gesture covering the whole bare expanse of hall, said:

"There *are* two chairs in the reception-room," and led the way to a small room off the hall. Drawing out one of the chairs for me, he fell into the other with a kind of cozy much-at-home air and waited for me to begin.

I, too, waited. For once I did not know how to take the lead in an interview. So we sat some seconds staring stupidly at each other. At least I felt stupid. Gone was my reportorial detachment—what my friends called my "callous newspaper boldness." I was simply a girl, my wits put to flight by a tall, good-looking stranger with a cheerful smile. Then my dignity came back with a rush. This was too silly!

"You must pardon me," I began, "for intruding on you at your dinner hour, I fear." I paused. He waved away the implication. "Any old time for that." Then waited again, courteously.

"I represent the *Daily Opinion.*" I lingered over that to note his reaction. There being none aside from "That's interesting!" I went on:

"I'm interested, *you* might say *curiously* interested, in your advertisement of last Tuesday and today." He looked cheerfully blank. "Rather unusual, you know—in the amount offered—for a simple marketing purse."

This time he registered perplexity—still cheerful. "Ad. about—a—purse—in the *Opinion?* I'll have to admit I'm as much in the dark as you are."

"But the advertisement distinctly gave this number and—so you really know nothing about Mrs. Barton's purse?" My voice was a challenge. What had he in his pocket?

"Not a thing, I swear! And besides, Mrs. Barton is in New York. She went up ten days ago—is renovating and refurnishing the house and is selecting the stuff."

My jaw dropped. A horrid thing, I confess, but symbolic of the falling into shreds of my whole brilliant theory. Yet, true to my training, my mind was already at work to rescue it from utter destruction. Optimistically I had a "hunch" of even more exciting possibilities for my paper—my story for it. I drew the clipping from my bag and silently handed it to him. His eyes smiled as he read the printed slip—and my thought.

"There *is* something behind this. Wish I could help you out, but I am absolutely ignorant—and—innocent!" He laughed that good laugh again. I got up to go. He sprang to his feet, at the same time thrusting his hand into his coat pocket. He fumbled a little and brought up a disreputable-looking pipe. Another thrust and he held in his hand a long, brown leather tobacco pouch! With the seemingly unconscious act he remarked:

"If you get any light on the matter I wonder whether you object to letting me know?" He opened the door. "In fact, I'd like to try out my sleuth-like brain upon it, too—if you'll be good enough to let me have your name and address. Mine's Gervase Pulliston—in Judge Barton's office."

I gave him my name, Elizabeth Marlin, care of the *Opinion.* My house address was my own. We bade each other politely cordial adieus.

"Now, where am I 'at'?" I reflected At sea, of course. I hastily reverted to a plan that had previously crossed my mind of going to the "scene of the tragedy"—that is, to the corner grocery at Broad and Valence.

It was not far away, and was like a hundred other groceries, a plain, low, wooden building, with entrances from the two streets. Only a few pedestrians were passing, and I could survey the field under cover of waiting for a street-car. My eyes roved with assumed idle indifference over the two entrances.

"She"—for I had established to my satisfaction that it was a woman—"came out of that door on Broad street. She left her purse 'in haste' *outside* the grocery. That's queer! She must have laid it down somewhere. But where?" I stepped close to the door and scanned the pavement from that angle.

"On week-days," I mused, "there would

be boxes and crates standing here. She laid her purse down to adjust her marketing, perhaps; but Mrs. Barton would not carry a basket—of course her car could have been waiting. "But Mrs. Barton's in New York—was in New York that very day, and——"

My speculation was broken into and my attention drawn from it by a little flurry of wind which lifted a piece of paper from the gutter and sent it whirling to my feet. My eyes followed the course it had taken to the curb where the Saturday night's accumulation of débris had been swept from the store into one unsightly mound. Some crates held it down. The whole was directly beside one of the little board bridges leading from street to sidewalk. I moved over to it. A tea-box joggled an orange crate close to the "bridge." The latter was filled with loose paper and the opening was concealed by its position.

Still with an air of bored curiosity I poked the toe of my shoe among the worthless trash, gradually pushing the crate around. From among the damp papers an inert mass fell toward the front. I waited, looking up and down the street. No one was in sight. Then I stooped and drew from its sordid surroundings a dark, moist object. Slipping it into my capacious sweater pocket, I hailed a coming trolley and boarded it. My hand was pressed firmly on a wad of limp brown leather!

Safely in my room, with excitement mounting, I examined my "find." Fifty dollars in denominations of ten, but nothing else! Mystery upon mystery—and Mrs. Barton in New York! Uncanny, to say the least! What should I do next? I thought I knew. I ran down to the phone in the hall and rang up "Sycamore, 2332," the number given me, and sounding like one to conjure with, I thought. There came a cheerful "Hello," in a voice already pleasantly familiar. I said I had made some important discoveries.

"Good!" I gave him my boarding-house address. You see, I had to!

"Will be with you in twenty minutes," he said. "Good-by!"

With his enthusiastic entrance I knew everything—*everything*—was going to be explained. He was intensely interested in the purse.

"It *is* Mrs. Barton's. I've seen her housekeeper, Elise Dement, hand it to her, and *vice-versa*. I'm at the house a lot, you know—looking after it now. Gee! I've just thought of something! I may use the phone?" I nodded. He dashed into the hall.

Green, 8927. Yes! This you, Elise? Mr. Puliston. Say, Elise, I want to talk to you a few minutes. No, not at the house—here, at a friend's. Oh, sorry! Then may I come around with a young lady? All right. Good-by."

But I wasn't willing to go just then. He seemed truly like an old friend, as he'd called me, and I was in the state which requires a girl to show a man then, if ever, how well she looks "dolled up." In plain words, I wanted him to go, but—to come back!

"The old lady's at her daughter's. Lame and can't get out. If you don't mind waiting half an hour, I believe I'll be able to untangle the whole thing."

I put on my one really attractive dress. Pale blue, with touches of gold embroidery, yet simple enough for any man. I loosened my hair, put on my best slippers and was ready. No, not quite. I wanted to go over every inch of that purse once more. I couldn't give up my fixed idea that, aside from the money, there was *something else in that purse*. I sat down with it in my hand.

My belief was justified. A hard substance right under the flap of the purse where it was joined on gave way at my pressure. I could slip it along with my finger. I ran upstairs for my scissors and, cutting around the flap with great care, brought to light a bit of tissue paper. With hand shaking I unwrapped the paper and in a second there lay in my palm a marvelous sapphine! Large, but exquisitely cut, and of a heavenly blue.

Going back to the parlor, I was still absorbing the thrilling lights and color of the gem when Mr. Puliston came in. He was

nearly breathless with something more than haste.

"You can give your *Daily Opinion* a nice, newsy paragraph, sure enough," he exclaimed boyishly, then stopped in the middle of the room and stared at me. It was a bit longer and differently from the way he had stared that morning at the Bartons. Then he came closer.

"Perfectly lovely!" He spoke in a low, queer voice.

"Isn't it?" I held out my hand with the glorious blue-rayed jewel.

"The sapphire! You found it? That is what I rushed to tell you. Elsie said to look under the flap, but you beat me to it! I'll tell you all about it now."

He got out his handkerchief and mopped his face as he fell into a chair and began:

"First, though, it wasn't lameness entirely, but collapse from fright that sent Elise to bed. And you'll not wonder. You see, she had gone to the Broad and Valence street market, as her custom is, on Monday evening, and had taken her little granddaughter with her. Knowing her utter reliability, Mrs. Barton gave her the purse and the sapphire and asked her to stop at Vosburg's and have it set in a pin which, it seems, she herself had already selected. The jeweler's place was closed earlier than usual for some reason, and so Elise went on to the store. However, for safety she had inserted the stone between two layers of the leather, where you found it.

"Coming out with a jostling crowd, her cape became unfastened. She laid the purse on a crate by the door while she adjusted it. Just then the little girl, seeing her opportunity, broke away and darted toward the curb. Elise forgot everything else and ran frantically after her. It was all in the shortest possible time, but when she got to the crate the purse was gone. We know it fell among the papers in the crate, but she naturally enough supposed it had been picked up by some one in the hurrying crowd.

"She was wild, of course, and as Mrs. Barton was leaving so soon, the poor thing decided to stake all her savings on the chance of getting the purse and sapphire back. I never saw any one recover as fast as she did when she heard my story. All clear as sapphires, now isn't it?"

"I'm terribly sorry for the poor woman—and glad! See what comes from having a sleuth's instinct and a mercenary motive," I laughingly rejoined.

"And the reward?" he asked mischievously.

"Remains in the cracked teapot, broken-nosed pitcher or wherever the housekeeper hides her savings."

The house-bell rang violently. A maid came to the door to say an old lady wished to see Mr. Puliston.

"She simply couldn't wait!" He ran down the hall to escort a bright-eyed, gray-haired little woman into the room. As soon as we were introduced she waved a yellow envelope toward Gervase.

"Please read this aloud," she said. "It came after you left."

One eager, the other puzzled, we stood while he unfolded the sheet. The message was dated March 19th, and was from New York, addressed to Mrs. Elise Dement, and ran:

"Give pin to Mr. Gervase Puliston on the 20th, with my love and congratulations.

"(Signed) M. V. BARTON."

We all gasped in unison. Gervase looked from one to the other of us as if dazed by the news.

"This is the 20th—and my birthday! Well!"

He seemed incapable of more. He looked down at the blue stone he was still holding, then made an abrupt movement toward the old woman, who was gloating over him like a mother.

"Elise, please ask her—Elizabeth Marlin—whether I shall have it set in a pin for myself, or in a ring for her?" Then he turned and gave me, oh, such a *good* look—just like his laugh! But Elise jumped up and down in her best French manner, clapping her hands like a child. As for me, it was not my jaw that dropped this time, but my eyes! I couldn't let Gervase see all the joy in them!

# Buck Nolan Intercedes

By J. B. WARRENTON

THE posters in front of the smoke-grimed building which housed the newspaper gave the startling news: "Murder and robbery! Chief kills butler and makes getaway with twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds! Among the stolen gems was the famous Peaters's diamond! Police have several clues!"

A thick-set man with hard eyes stood at a corner near State street watching a ragged urchin winding his way through a mass of vehicles until he stood before him.

"Poiper, Mister?" chirped the youngster. "Full 'count o' de——"

"I'll take one," growled the thick-set person, delving into his pants pocket and pulling out a fistful of silver. "Take that."

Without another word he turned on his heel and strode west, leaving the pop-eyed, gaping youngster staring after him.

"Gee!" he piped, "dat guy musta gone dippy!"

But Buck Nolan had not gone "dippy." He was heading for his room in a dingy, tumble-down brick house three streets away. Before the house he paused, glanced up and down the squalid street, then ran lightly up the steps and vanished within. In his room he breathed a sigh of relief and shot home a heavy bolt on the door. He then squared his hunched shoulders and for the first time he fixed his eyes on the large, black type.

MURDER AND ROBBERY.

THIEF KILLS FAITHFUL BUTLER AND GETS AWAY WITH THE PEATERS' JEWELS —POLICE HAVE ONLY SLIGHT CLUE.

This was certainly a tribute to his skillful work. Buck Nolan smiled and eagerly read on.

"There are only slight clues at hand, although Headquarters detectives are trailing a suspect, one Dude Kelley, an expert house-breaker and all-around crook. They expect to have him in custody in a very few hours."

Buck flung the paper from him; he grinned at first, then chuckled at the thought of the dick on the trail of the wrong man.

His face was set in grim lines as he lowered himself into a chair before a table and, bringing forth a sheet of writing-paper, he began to write:

"Dear Nell: You read the papers. The bulls are hot on the heels of Dude. It's fer the Peaters' job. Tell him——"

Buck Nolan tore the sheet up, then muttering began another.

"Dear Nellie: Do you ever remember the time when you and me useta talk about a guy ain't always certain of breakin' loose from the old game, even though he's trying like blazes? There's always something about his past that crops up before him, when he's fighting to stay on the level. I was thinking of that when I read the paper and see the bulls are after Dude——"

For the second time Buck Nolan tore up and cast aside the pieces. Then he brought forth another sheet of paper, and with head bowed, shoulders hunched, he scribbled until he had covered the whole sheet of paper with many written passages and misspelt words. He then arose, and with firm hands folded the letter and enclosed it in an en-

velope. Then he seated himself again and addressed it:

"Mrs. Nellie Kelley."

Buck paused after affixing the name, scratching his head with the end of the pencil.

"Blamed if I know her address," he muttered.

He arose, placed the letter in his coat pocket and walked to the dresser, where a none too clean mirror hung on the wall. He combed his ruffled hair and started as his hand flew to his necktie.

"Gad," he ejaculated, turning from the mirror and searching eagerly about the room, "I wonder where I lost that pin?"

A stick-pin which Buck had worn ever since he entered on his career of crime, and which was also as well known to the police as the wearer, was missing from its usual place.

Somewhat disturbed by the loss, he adjusted his hat at a rakish angle on his head and sallied forth.

Buck Nolan had just turned the corner of Boylston Street in the Great White Way, when he was startled by a salutation. His face paled and his hand moved swiftly to his hip-pocket as he turned with narrowed eyes.

Smiling at him from a doorway was a lean, pasty-face individual, puffing a cigarette, who was beckoning with his claw-like finger.

"Oh, it's you, Coakey," greeted Buck, a sigh of relief escaping from between his lips. "I didn't see you."

"It's quite a spell since we last met, Buck," grinned Coakey. "That Peaters' job was a killin'. Wonder who's the bird that made that clean-up?"

"I know one guy that didn't do it," said Buck.

"Who? You?" Coakey grinned.

"No, the guy the bulls are trying ter pin it on."

"Dude Kelley?"

Buck Nolan nodded.

"I thought he was hittin' ther straight and narrow," said Coakey.

"I guess he was," said Buck. "Say, Coakey, do yer know where he lives?"

Coakey replied that he did not. Then he asked:

"How'd yer know that the dicks are after Kelley?"

"The *Planet's* got a big write-up 'bout it."

Coakey eyed Buck narrowly for a split instant. He lighted a cigarette and flipped the burned match into the street.

"Say, Buck," he sneered from the corner of his mouth, "what's the big idea? You and Dude were about as friendly as a pair of tomcats. You should worry if the bulls send him up."

"You're right, Coakey; Dude and I weren't too friendly."

The other stared and flipped the half-smoked cigarette the way the match went.

"I guess I'm beginning ter see light," said Coakey. "You're thinking of that—that little skirt that married Dude. You were sweet on her, weren't you?"

Buck's face softened. Even a pained look crossed his coarse features.

"Yes," he admitted, "I was fond of her, and it was her welfare I was thinking of. You know what she done for me, Coakey? She was straight, and had no use for a crook. You know how I hid in the little store she run on the water-front, the day that the cops were at my heels for that stick-up job in the South Station. She hides me and shooes them off. She asked me afterwards to go straight. I tried, but——" His voice broke. Something like a muffled growl escaped him as he cleared his throat. Buck took the other's arm in a vise-like grip and went on: "You know, Coakey, what she saved me from. A twenty stretch. Then the cops got hep to it that she helped me in me get-away and they drives her outa business."

"You'll still sweet on her, ain't yer, Buck?" ventured Coakey, trying his utmost to show sympathy.

"Yes," asserted Nolan, "and always will be. I ain't seen her in nearly four years. But him," he gritted savagely, "I'd laugh if I could see him lock-stepping it to ther chair. She's his wife now, and——"

There was silence for a few seconds.

Coakey flicked a speck of cigarette ashes from his coat-lapel, adjusted his hat and extended his hand.

"I must be moving, Buck," he said. "Four years is a long time. I saw her since then, and she looked as though she mighta been sick. But, Buck," he leaned forward confidentially, "who pulled the Peaters' trick?"

"Dude didn't," said Buck firmly, "so pass it up. You know me, Coakey; I never snitched yet."

While speaking Buck had his left-hand deep in his pant's pocket, and was fondling the Peaters' diamond with his fingers.

"Every dick in Headquarters is out to get the guy that done the Peaters' job," said Coakey, "and your old friend, McCarney, is on ther job, too."

Buck Nolan started guiltily, his eyes narrowing to pin-points. He glanced furtively up and down the street.

"I'm off," he said shortly. "I'll see you later."

Buck Nolan kept steadily heading west. He was unconscious of the fact that he was being trailed by a huge, square-shouldered figure who had "Headquarters" plastered all over him.

Buck kept going until he stood before an old-fashioned brick building, from within which came the roaring din of colossal presses. He dodged within the low-framed door and disappeared.

The human bloodhound on his trail grinned maliciously, stationed his bulky form in a near-by doorway and lighted a big black cigar.

Nolan hurried up the greasy flight of steps to a door marked "editor." There he paused for an instant, then gingerly pushed the door open.

A tow-headed kid, his freckled face buried in a magazine, looked up at the intruder and scowled.

"Whatcha want?" he demanded.

"I wanna see ther main squeeze. Somebody that'll put a mistake right in ther paper," answered Buck.

The boy ushered Buck into a waiting-room, where the glare from many incandescent lights stirred him to a feeling of uneasiness.

He sat alone in silence for several minutes when the boy returned. Following in his wake was a portly, red-face man with gray hair.

He glared at the caller from under a pair of cold gray eyes which were curtained by gray, bushy eyebrows, then snapped out sharply:

"What can I do for you? State your business, sir, as time is money here."

Buck awkwardly doffed his headgear, and with a noticeable constraint moved toward the speaker.

"I want ter correct something you published in your paper about the Peaters' job. You gave a half-page to it, but you're all wrong."

The portly man scowled. He raised a hand impatiently.

"Did you come here to pick faults in our publication?" he snapped. "If so—show him out, Thomas." The latter to the tow-headed boy.

Buck hurriedly tried to explain. But the other's aggressive eyes seemed to muddle his brain and paralyze his tongue.

"Well, why don't you speak?" rasped the editor. "Do you know anything about the killing and robbery?"

Buck's courage came back at the other's question.

"If I slip you some straight dope, mister, you'll keep it under your hat, won't you?" he asked eagerly.

"You can rest assured, my man," said the editor, "that we don't make known the source of our information, if that's what you mean. Of course, if you come to us with a lot of misleading lies—that's different. But what abbout the Peaters job? What do you know about it?"

Buck Nolan's courage was now fully restored.

"You guys published ther dope that Dude Kelley pulled off ther Peaters' trick," he explained. "But you're all wrong; so's ther cops."

"Where did you get your information?"

"I ain't telling. You know what ther Peaterses lost. It was a flock of ice, and

amongst it the sparkler that old Peaters brought from India. Every crook in the country knows the history of that stone. How every one that ever owned it died by violence. Most crooks are superstitious, and Dude Kelley was a bug on superstition. That's why I know he didn't do ther job."

The gray eyes of the listener sparkled with new luster. He was all attention now and even smiled.

"So Dude Kelley was superstitious, was he? H'm!" He turned aside thoughtfully for an instant, then turned again to Buck, waving him to a chair. "Be seated," he invited, "and we'll talk it over. If we made an error in using an innocent man's name we surely will do the proper thing by correcting it. You don't happen to be Dude Kelley, are you?"

Buck Nolan shook his head.

"Not me."

"He sent you here, I take it?"

Buck shook his head again.

"Not him."

"Well, will you tell me who did?"

Buck was silent for a few seconds before replying. His thoughts reverted to the gentle girl he had lost, and for whom he was jeopardizing his life and liberty—the girl of his shattered dreams—the girl that was now the wife of the one man he hated like poison.

"I just come to correct a mistake," he said evasively.

"Hum! You don't mind telling me your name, do you?"

Buck glanced at the other sharply.

"'Tain't necessary, is it?"

"Sure is," replied the other. "You're not ashamed of your name, are you? How do I know but what you may be Dude Kelley, after all."

"I told yer before that I wasn't Dude," retorted Buck with some heat. "I just wanted to put you wise ter your mistake, and shoo ther bulls off an innocent man."

"That's all very good," said the other grimly, "but we pay no attention to complaints from unknown persons."

Buck could hardly control his rising anger and disappointment.

"It don't do your paper no good to give out wrong news, does it?" he insisted.

"You're the only one that's calling it wrong," blazed the other. "And you're ashamed to give me your name."

Buck rose slowly and adjusted his hat on his head.

"Supposin' you ring up Headquarters and pass them the dope about the Hindu stone," chanced Buck as a last resort. "I'm game ter face ther police."

"There may be something in your story, after all, my friend," admitted the editor. "Now, let me see; I wonder if I got all your information correct?"

"I dunno," growled Buck.

"On second thought," said the other, "I think I'll call in a reporter to take down your information. I don't handle that end of it. I'm the editor."

He started for the door, when his eyes lit on the tow-headed boy.

"Tom," he ordered, "bring a reporter in here at once. Lively!"

He turned again to Buck. He was smiling and politely attentive.

"You won't have long to wait, my friend," he assured him.

"I don't see any need of my waiting," growled Buck, who could not suppress a feeling of rising fear. "You've got all ther dope."

"Quite right, quite right," agreed the other hurriedly. "I'll get a man quicker than the boy. You sit down and I'll shut the door so that you will not be disturbed."

Buck opened his mouth to protest, but before he could utter a word the editor was gone.

Five minutes; ten minutes; fifteen minutes. All the while, seeping through open transoms, came the bang of doors, the ringing of an electric bell and the sinister shuffling of many footsteps on the greasy stairs. The crook shivered and cold sweat oozed from the pores in his forehead.

Like an animal at bay, Buck, in a state of frenzy, looked about the room for means to escape. There were only two doors and one window in the room. He glided swiftly across the polished floor to the door, laid a trembling hand on the knob and turned it.

He pushed lightly, then harder. It was locked!

Quickly he ran to the other door. That also was fastened. Trapped! His hand dropped limply at his side and, stunned by the turn of affairs, he staggered back to the chair trembling.

In the next instant the editor had flung open the door Buck last tried.

"Sorry to detain you so long, my friend," he said apologetically, beaming upon the crook, "but a reporter will be here in a very few moments."

"Say, bo," snarled Buck, his big fists clinched pugnaciously, "what's ther big idea of locking ther doors? You got all the dope on this an' I'm going."

"But, my good friend," said the other soothingly, "surely you can wait a few minutes. You came here voluntarily to correct an error. We want the right story, every word of it. We are willing even to pay for it. As for the locked doors," he explained, "they all have spring locks on the other side. Name your price and let's get down to business."

"I don't want any money," growled Buck. He cursed himself for coming there; but sentimental thoughts of the girl were responsible for his action. He braced his shoulders and started for the door. "I'm going, now; I got business to attend to," he roared.

The next moment the editor stood before him coolly.

"Not so fast, old-timer!" he exclaimed. "You're going to stay a while."

"Blast yer," blustered Buck, "what's the big idea?"

"The big idea is this: I'm going to call your bluff."

Buck Nolan glared at the editor, his breath coming and going in quick, jerky gasps.

"Yer mean you're going ter stop me from going out?"

"Nothing like that, old-timer," said the other smoothly; "you can go when you please. But what good will it do you? We of the press have our methods of getting what we want, so when you get to the street you'll find that you'll have the company of two of the *Planet's* reporters that you'll find hard to shake."

The editor stepped aside and turned his back on Buck. He smiled as he bit the end from a cigar, lighted it and puffed serenely.

"Say, bo," blurted out Buck, "I thought that you newspaper guys were straight shooters."

"Straight shooters," echoed the other. "You haven't shot straight with me. You breeze in here with a story about an error we made in our paper and want it corrected. You flounder about until you cast a lot of mystery about yourself and the story, then balk at telling me who you are, and why you came to me with such a tale. Why, that story would be the biggest scoop that we've had in years. Come, now, am I not right? Meet me fifty-fifty, if you're on the level."

Again the blood rushed to Buck's face. Again he closed his fists in blinding passion.

"It's the truth, all right," Buck bellowed, "and I want yer ter call off the cops from Dude. Nolan's my name—Buck Nolan. My mug is down in Headquarters, and I'm booked as a peterman and housebreaker. I was Dude Kelley's old pal. He goin' straight now, that's why I come to get his name cleared. I can prove he didn't do the trick. Look at this."

He drew his hand from his pant's pocket, then shoved forth an open palm on which rested the biggest diamond that the editor ever gazed at.

"That's the Hindu jewel," he hissed, with a tinge of triumph in his voice. "That's the sparkler that most of ther crooks wouldn't touch no more'n they'd touch a rattlesnake. I ain't telling where I got it, but I want ter show you that Dude is straight and I'm shootin' ther right dope."

With nerves tensed, Buck waited for the other's verdict.

The editor picked up the stone gingerly just as heavy footbeats and hushed voices wafted into the room from outside. Buck shot a quick glance at the door just as it was thrown open. His head thrust forward, a wolfish snarl on his lips, the trapped

crook's hand streaked for his hip-pocket. Too late.

Framed in the door-casing were five men. Inspector McCarney among them. His hand was in his coat pocket, but a protuberance there bespoke a weapon.

"Pinched," Buck exclaimed.

The squatty, square-jawed plainclothes men strode within.

The editor raised his eyes to the intruders. As he did so he carelessly dropped the fatal stone into his office-coat pocket.

"Why this intrusion, gentlemen?" he questioned sharply.

"We're after this bird," informed McCarney, inclining his head toward Buck Nolan.

Buck grinned at him defiantly.

"I'm all yours, Mac," he said grimly. "Get it over with."

If the editor played fair there was an even chance for him. He had the stone, and there was nothing on him but a gat; that only meant a fine of three months in the pen.

McCarney walked up to the editor and inquired respectfully:

"I ain't butting in where I ain't wanted, am I, Mr. Sears?"

"Not at all," assured Mr. Sears. "You're Mr. McCarney from Headquarters, I take it?"

"You take it right," grinned the detective.

The editor was thoughtful for several seconds.

"Well, we're in luck," he remarked lightly. "Perhaps you can assist this gentleman and me clear up a very important matter, which has wronged a dear friend of his and is liable to get my paper in wrong. In fact," he continued, fixing a set gaze on the trapped crook, "he had suggested that I notify the police, as the matter on hand concerns the Peaters' robbery and murder."

"He suggested that?" repeated the Headquarters man skeptically. "Don't make me laugh, Mr. Sears."

"No cause for merriment whatsoever, Mr. McCarney," responded the editor coolly, his hand delving into his office-coat pocket. "He informs me that you folks are on the wrong track and my paper is wrong in our statement that Dude Kelley did the Peaters job."

Buck Nolan held his breath as Mr. Sears slowly drew his hand from the pocket. He sighed with relief as the hand merely withdrew a small box of matches.

"What does he say he knows about the job?" asked McCarney with a sneer.

The editor lighted a cigar before he answered and returned the matches to his pocket.

"He says that your department—in fact, the whole police force—and my paper are barking up the wrong tree when we try to pin the job on Dude Kelley. He stands ready to prove it by the notorious Peaters diamond."

"The Peaters diamond?" ejaculated McCarney. "You don't mean to tell me that he knows where that stone is?"

"I didn't say that," denied the editor. "But he's positive that Dude Kelley never did the job; was too superstitious to take it."

McCarney looked from one to the other. He scowled at Buck and grinned impudently at the editor.

"Say, Mr. Sears," he said, with as much sarcasm as he could command without offending the newspaper man, "you're not trying to hand me the bunk that this bird's championing Dude Kelley?"

"I wanna save an innocent man," said Buck doggedly.

"Not you?" cried McCarney.

"Yes, me," snapped back Buck. "Dude's walking ther straight and narrow, and I know it."

Inspector McCarney's coarse features twisted with rage.

"Well, that's rich," he sneered. "Say, Mr. Sears, that's the best joke I've heard for some time. Think of this dirty crook trying to save his worst enemy's neck. Gee, what a pipe dream."

Buck saw at a glance that the game was up. Again his hand stole to his pocket as his eyes measured the distance to the door.

The Headquarters man, whose eyes were glued on the trapped crook, noted the move and look. He unlimbered his service re-

volver and jammed it into Buck's midriff.

"That'll be enough from you, Nolan," he snarled. "Take hold of him, boys."

The other officers who had entered the room stepped forward, and in less than a second Buck Nolan was a prisoner.

"Search him," ordered the Headquarters man, ignoring the protest.

Dexterously two of the plainclothes men emptied Buck's pockets. The revolver was the only criminating thing found on him. As the search was nearly terminated one of the detectives brought to light the sealed letter addressed to Mrs. Nellie Kelley.

McCarney tore it open, read it, then handed it to the editor.

"Read it out loud," he grunted.

Then, while every one in the room was silent, Sears read the letter in his hand.

"DEAR NELLIE: It's quite a long time since you have heard from me. I guess maybe you didn't care if you ever heard from me again, but I want you to know that things ain't been the same since the old days with you. But if you forgot me, I didn't forget you.

"I see by the papers that the bulls are after Dude for the Peaters job, and I thinks to myself that it's no joke for the bulls to nail you, even if it's only to grill you.

"So, Nellie, I gonna go to the paper and tell them they're all wrong. I'll tell 'em to shoo the bulls offen Dude. Then I may hop a rattler for the South, as I hear you are there for your health, and I'd like to see you once more and cheer you up if I can.

"I hope you will be all well when you get this. Don't worry what the papers say about Dude, I'll fix that."

The editor was silent for a moment after reading the simple, doleful letter. The crestfallen crook raised his head and said in a low tone:

"I hope you're satisfied that I'm tellin' ther truth."

He looked at McCarney when he spoke.

"I'm satisfied that you're a d—n liar, Nolan," bellowed the Headquarters man. He turned to the editor and went on. "Say, Mr. Sears, perhaps you're not aware who this guy is. He's Buck Nolan—listed at Police Headquarters as a safe-blower, stick-up and all-around crook."

McCarney advanced toward Buck with a pair of shiny, steel handcuffs dangling in his left hand. In his right he held his revolver.

"Stick 'em out, Nolan. Murder will always out. I arrest you in the name of the law for the Peaters robbery and the murder of Pat Henry, the butler. You've heard often enough that anything you say will be used against you."

Buck was ghastly now. He had walked into a trap to save—— He braced himself for the last card.

"Yer can't prove it, Mac," he blurted out with a clinging hope. "Yer didn't find nothing on me but that gun."

"Didn't need to," gloated the Headquarters man. "We found your serpent-head stick-pin clutched tightly in the right hand of your victim. In the struggle he musta grabbed your necktie. We know that pin well; in fact, it's the only one of its kind in this country."

Buck's last bluff had failed.

"I'm through," he muttered.

"It's bum dope, Nolan, this mixing business with skirts," said McCarney.

Buck squared his broad shoulders as his eyes flashed.

"It's the only decent thing I ever done in my life," said Buck. "That's the least I could do for Nellie, anyhow."

"The girl you were sweet on?"

"Yes," Buck murmured.

"I'm sorry, Nolan," said McCarney, not unkindly, "but she passed out last winter. Let's go."

# Ink

By WILLIAM A. UCKER

THE dollar bill, driven by a puff of wind, half danced, half slid across the pavement and lodged against the prongs of an iron picket fence. The momentary flash of green caught the eye of a passing man who darted forward to seize it.

He had just grasped the note when there came a thud of heavy footsteps, the swing of a foot and a heel ground his hand against the concrete.

"Drop it!" came a rough command from above, and the man, with a sharp cry of pain, looked up.

"You're breaking my hand!" he cried.

"Yuh heard what I said, didn't yuh?" replied Red Mullins.

His heel dug deeper into the imprisoned hand, grinding it against the pavement and tearing the skin with a sharp twist which threatened to crush the knuckles. A second cry of pain came from the stooping man as the tingling fingers released the bill. He struggled vainly to free his hand from the agonizing pressure which became even greater as Mullins, throwing his full weight upon his outstretched foot, leaned forward to pick up the note.

The pressure was now eased and the bleeding hand released. Applying it to his lips, the man arose to face Mullins who, secure in the advantage given by his six feet in height and bull-like shoulders, calmly stuffed the bill into his pocket.

The smaller man seemed about to speak, then, apparently recognizing the futility of it, turned away with a stiffled moan, when he was grasped by the shoulder and swung around to again face his attacker.

"Where do yuh think yer goin'?" Mullins asked.

His fingers probed deeply into the shoulder of his captive as if seeking to puncture the flesh. He appeared to find a savage sort of enjoyment in the squirming of his victim, who was now twisting and writhing in a vain attempt to escape from the steady pressure.

Mullins was like that. Any opportunity to inflict pain had always given him a pleasure equaled only by the joy he experienced when destroying something of value to another whose destruction was not of the slightest benefit to himself. The dollar bill was in his pocket and the only possible claimant to it was too anxious to leave immediately, relinquishing both field and money.

But it wasn't Red's nature to leave well enough alone when such an opportunity as this was offered. The street was deserted and the same cruel wantonness which caused him to pour ink on expensive carpets, to scar beautiful furniture and break costly mirrors, found in isolated, deserted homes into which he had broken, now caused him to torture the original finder of the dollar bill. For the sufferings of another were always a matter of extreme pleasure to Mullins, being particularly so when they were of his own causing.

He now thrust his unshaven, pimply countenance with its inflamed, pig-like eyes, close to the pain-racked face of his captive. The latter, almost crying with futile anger at the unmerited pain to which he was being subjected, continued his attempts to squirm from under the tightening fingers.

"That'll learn yuh to keep yer dirty fingers off uv somethin' that belongs to me—see?" said Mullins, though his claim to ownership of the bill began at the exact moment he had seen another man—a smaller

man—about to pick it up from the pavement where obviously it had been lost.

His victim making no answer, Red continued:

"I oughter let yuh have one in the eye for luck."

It was not a belated squeamishness concerning the justice of letting his captive "have one for luck" that caused Mullins to weigh the question. For justice as an abstract quality was not a subject with which he was familiar. It was entirely a matter of place. At any moment now some one might draw near enough to witness the blow, and that some one might be a policeman with an inquiring turn of mind, a person to whom Red had no desire to make any extended explanations.

"I'm lettin' yuh off easy this time," he said, "but if yuh ever see me comin' again keep outer my way or I'll let yuh have somethin' yuh won't forget. Beat it, now."

And with a last grind of his fingers into the shoulder muscles of the smaller man, he released him with a sudden shove. The man ducked behind an automobile parked at the curb and ran rapidly away. It was not until then that Mullins noticed he was a cripple. It may be that that was the reason why the brute slapped his hand against his thigh and laughed.

Red needed the dollar that his greater strength had brought him, though he would have taken it anyway. It was now near evening, and he had eaten nothing since morning. He had been released from the penitentiary only three weeks previously, and the five dollars that the State had given him at the end of a six-year term for burglary had long since disappeared, chiefly for bootleg liquor.

Since that time he had subsisted mainly on "loans" extorted from the more defenseless of his acquaintances who were willing to part with a dollar or two if at the same time they might part with the borrower. For those who knew Mullins best never cared, paradoxically, to know him better, and this source of revenue had lately proved to be less and less productive, until he realized he would have to return to work.

Red had earned an unenviable name for himself in the underworld of the city, a name which caused other followers of his profession to firmly decline to go on a "job" with him. Those who did work with him for a while soon broke the partnership with the almost invariable prediction that some day he would come to the end that his vicious meanness and inhuman cruelty had long since earned him.

For burglars and second-story men, even as other craftsmen, have a certain pride in work well done and dislike to see a clean job spoiled by the wanton destruction which always followed Mullins's entry into a tenantless home.

Red now took the dollar bill from his pocket and twisted it between his dirty fingers. His eyes searched up and down the street until they had located a nearby lunchroom, where the major portion of it was spent for a composite lunch and dinner.

Leaving the lunchroom, he walked to the corner of the block and boarded a car going toward the city's suburb. After riding some twenty blocks, he left the car and began to walk.

There was no sense, he thought, in riding right up to the house he intended to plunder and run the chance of having the conductor identify him later in case he were picked up on suspicion; for Mullins was possessed of a certain cunning gained chiefly from long experience, and was about to resume his interrupted profession by breaking into a house marked by him the day before during a tour of inspection as one which had apparently been deserted by its occupants for the summer months.

The delay in his uninvited visit had been occasioned by the necessity of borrowing a set of "tools." Swift pats about his clothing assured him that he still possessed them. Plenty of time yet, he thought. He slowed his pace.

A dim light burning in the library was not discernible from the outside, for the man in the room had not raised the heavy blinds. There was nothing more to do now except—— The letter had been written and lay on the broad mahogany desk beside the heavy brass inkwell.

The servants would see it when they entered the room the next morning to clean and air it against the impending return of his family. Or, should the shock from the discovery of his body prove too great, it might remain unread until the police and coroner arrived. Some one would pick it up, however, recognizing it for what it was, and read the story of his defalcations as the reason for what he was about to do.

He shuddered a little as he opened a drawer in the desk and took out a heavy automatic pistol. The small reading lamp did not sufficiently illuminate the room and its corners were dim as his eyes traveled around it. He shuddered again and, thrusting the gun back, closed the drawer.

Was there no other way? He could vision the resulting scandal, the manner in which the newspapers would use their largest type to tell about it.

Dawson Riggs, president of the Commercial Bank, founded by his grandfather, a suicide. An examination being made of the bank's books and resources. Large defalcations feared. He could picture the clamoring depositors, his bewildered associates, his stricken wife.

He rose and began to pace the room. He knew there was no other way. He had abandoned the last hope that afternoon when his brokers had denied him another extension of time. On the morrow they would sell him out, his accounts, time and again bolstered with the bank's funds, a total loss.

Their letters and telegrams demanding additional margins had brought him from the seashore, whence his family would follow in a few days. No, there was no other way.

He returned to the desk, opened the drawer and again took out the pistol. He gazed once more about the dimly lighted room. The highly polished floor reflected the light with a dull gleam. The rugs which usually covered it had been rolled up for the summer and now lay stacked in a pile near the desk, wrapped in heavy paper.

He moved toward the pile of rugs and then, stopping, reached back and snapped off the light. No need for that, he thought, while the darkness would hide what he was about to do.

Slightly bewildered by the sudden blackness, he took another step in the direction of the piled rugs and was momentarily thrown off his balance. His foot slipped on the polished floor and his feet went out from under him.

His body fell backward as his arms flailed the air in wild gyrations, his head striking with a crash against the heavy wooden claw into which the end of the desk leg was formed.

The pistol fell with a sharp clatter. The hand which had held it quivered once and then was still. He lay quietly, his body hidden by the desk and pile of rugs toward which a thin trickle of red ran through the darkness.

It was just a few moments later that there was a dull explosion in the vault of the Commercial Bank which was not heard by the stunned and bound night watchman.

Shortly afterwards three figures ran swiftly from a side door, threw the weighted bags they carried into a waiting automobile and drove off rapidly.

In like manner it was just a few moments later that Red Mullins's jimmy succeeded in prying loose a window in the rear of the house he had marked.

It was also just a few moments after this that a patrol wagon loaded with policemen set out from the station-house in response to a telephone call.

For Mullins's entrance had not gone unnoticed. Across the yard was located a neighbor's garage above which a crippled gardener lived. He had seen the skulking figure of Red and, with bated breath, had watched him enter the house, when he had telephoned for the police from the garage extension.

Ordinarily the gardener would have been asleep at this late hour, but tonight he had been unable to sleep. He had been sitting at the window nursing the broken, aching fingers of his hand which Red Mullins had injured to get that dollar bill.

Hooking a leg over the sill of the window he had forced, Mullins climbed through. Cautious flashing of his electric

torch soon told him that he had entered the pantry, from which, through a swinging door, he went into the kitchen and thence to the dining-room.

Here a rapid examination soon showed that the silver had been removed. Guided by flashes of his light, he left the forced drawers of the buffet standing open behind him and, passing through a broad reception hall, entered the library.

Here the first gleam of his light was reflected by the door of a secretary. He grasped the knob and pulled, but the door was locked. Playing his light upon it with one hand, with the other he pried his jimmy between the edge of the door and the side, ruthlessly gouging the finely grained wood to obtain a purchase.

There was a sound of splitting wood and the door flew open, revealing several pigeon-holes stuffed with papers and two small drawers. The latter yielded nothing valuable, while a hasty examination of the former showed them to be receipted bills, letters and personal papers of value to only the owner.

Cursing, Mullins reverted to type.

Tearing and crumpling the papers, he scattered them about the floor with a sweep of his hand and then shot beams of his light about the room. He was seeking his favorite means of retaliation against those who forgot to leave valuables behind when they went away for the summer.

The beam from his torch soon located a broad mahogany desk. In its center stood a heavy brass inkwell and his lips went back in a grin of anticipation. The heavy, expensive paper with which the walls of the room were covered would be improved with a little decoration, he thought. The neighboring houses were too close for him to give a complete demonstration of his destructive qualities, but ink, liberally sprinkled, is sometimes as costly as battered furniture and broken mirrors.

Not as satisfying to Mullins, perhaps, as other means he had taken under similar circumstances. The time, for instance, when he had worked two hours on a wall-safe only to find it empty when finally opened. On that occasion he had prowled about the house seeking something on which to vent his anger. The next day the police had found the caretaker dead in his bed, his skull crushed and his face battered almost beyond recognition.

Holding his light on the inkwell, Red moved toward the desk. He had not noticed a pile of paper-wrapped rugs lying in his path. His foot caught under them and he pitched forward. His free hand went out in a wild effort to save himself from falling and his body crashed against the desk.

Getting to his feet, he felt a wetness on his fingers. He steadied his light and saw that the hand which he had thrown out to regain his balance had overturned the inkwell.

The black fluid had formed in a pool on the top of the desk, from which little streams were running to drip over the sides. In the center of the pool lay what had once been a sheet of folded white paper, but even as he looked the absorbing fibre reached the saturation point and the writing became wholly black.

Rubbing his fingers on his trousers, he cursed again and swerved his flashlight. Its beam alighted squarely on the face of a man lying on the floor between the desk and the pile of rugs. A single glance told Mullins that he was dead. His face blanched as his heart gave a wild leap. For a moment he stood as one paralyzed. Then, guided as much by instinct as by his wildly waving light, he fled from the unnerving sight—straight into the arms of a policeman who was climbing through the jimmied pantry window.

The police at first attempted to establish a connection between the murder of Dawson Riggs and the burglary of the bank of which he was president, holding that, in some manner, the two were parts of one crime. In support of this theory Mullins was given liberal doses of the "third degree." But not only did the burglar deny the police contention, he even denied that he had killed Riggs, saying he was dead when he entered the house.

The family of the dead man was certain, however, that no one could have known he

was going to visit the house that night, and inclined to the theory that it was only a coincidence—a horrible coincidence—that he had surprised Mullins at work in his home on the same night that the bank was robbed.

The jury was called upon, however, to settle no such perplexing problems. There was no reference to the burglary of the Commercial Bank in Red's trial for murder and the jury saw eye to eye with the State's Attorney as he outlined his case and charged that Mullins, surprised by Riggs, pistol in hand, had mastered the latter and beaten him to death with his own weapon, which had been found near the body.

The twelve jurors saw it as a plain open-and-shut case of a burglar and murderer having been caught red-handed, and rendered their verdict accordingly.

On the day that Mullins, shrieking and struggling, paid the penalty for the crime of which he had been convicted, the family of the murdered man was informed by the administrator of the estate that he had left practically nothing.

"Mr. Riggs's entire fortune appears to have been lost through unfortunate speculations," he said. "There are, however, no debts, and he leaves an honored name."

On the same day a crippled gardener removed the wrappings from his broken fingers.

And on the same day an ancient negro, idly poking about a dumping ground where the city's trash was thrown, turned over a pile of torn and crumpled papers to disclose a letter so saturated with ink that no trace of white remained.

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## ANGEL FACE

WHEN Washington Force, one of Brooklyn's original "angel-faced" boys, was taken into the County Court, Brooklyn, to plead to a charge of burglary as a second offender, he told a story so moving of evil deeds that overtook him that Judge Vause permitted him to plead guilty to attempted burglary in the third degree as a first offense.

Eight years ago Force and a small group of boon companions barely in their teens formed a coterie of young criminals that gave Brooklyn police many weary months. They gained notoriety by their ability to enlist the sympathies of influential citizens who could see naught but innocence in their cherubic features. Thus they earned the pseudonym "angel-faced" boys.

But that was eight years ago. Force, he told the court, repented of his misdeeds and reformed. He got a job and married. A baby was born. In a few years he had worked up from a salary of $9 a week to $42 and was a trusted employee. There came a chance for promotion. He was selected by his employer for the position as cashier at a greatly increased salary. There was a formality of bonding that had to be complied with. In the investigation that followed it was discovered he had "served time." He was instantly dismissed.

Since then, he said, he had walked the streets in futile search of employment. Everywhere he went he was faced by his record. His wife and child alone believed in him and were his only friends. He saw them facing want and destitution. But he was determined for their sake to adhere to the straight path.

The break came, however, a few weeks ago. It was his wife's birthday. As Force left the house to seek work she told him she did not want a present, but if he could only obtain a job it would be the best gift she could receive.

He walked the streets all day, he said, without result. Everywhere he was met with rebuffs. "I became desperate," he told Judge Vause, "and the temptation to steal became too strong for me. I fell, and was caught."

Force was arrested in a recent shoe store burglary in Brooklyn, in which he nearly lost his life. He was pursued by a policeman and shot through the ear. As a result of his story he was permitted by Judge Vause to plead guilty to the lesser charge and was sentenced to one year in Sing Sing.

# *The* House on Lincoln Road

By JACK J. GOTTLIEB and ELMER YASPAN

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER FOUR

TWO, three minutes passed; and they were like tens of minutes. Red Loevner was growing cramped, but he dared not move. For all he knew the man was seated facing the portieres, and the least motion of them——

The best thing to do now, he decided, was to make a strong-arm job of it, as had been originally planned; take the couple by surprise, gag them, tie them hand and foot, loot the place and retire in haste. But he would wait for Russ Reynolds to make the first move. Russ was sort of director of this enterprise; he'd leave it to him. Russ no doubt thought as he did: to execute the job via the strong-arm method. He no doubt was waiting until the girl returned to the library, so that the two of them——

The cord of his thoughts tore. He stiffened suddenly. His hand squeezed the weapon in his pocket. For these words came to him, slowly, yet with a world of emphasis:

*"Come out, you, from behind the curtains, or I'll shoot!"*

Fraught with the sense of this unlooked-for calamity, it was characterictic of Red Loevner that he nevertheless kept a cool head. His brain worked fast. Whether it was he or Reynolds whose presence had been discovered he couldn't know; so he'd wait there behind the curtains.

And waiting he heard the rustle of other curtains—the movement of a heavy body. He heard a gasp of amazement; then a harsh, cruel laugh. That gasp had been the man's, the laugh Russ Reynolds's. So it was Russ who'd been discovered—not he, Red.

He took the chance then of peeping out. And what he saw more than surprised him. The revolver in the man's hand was drooping; he was pale; he shivered, and his eyes stared at Reynolds as though that individual were not a mere burglar, but some demon from the realm of Pluto. And Reynolds? He was seated in a chair and there was a sneering smile on his loose-knit face. He seemed perfectly at ease.

"You can put the gun away, Harry," he said to the man. "You look kinda nervous, and while it's pointed at me——"

"For God's sake, Reynolds, shut up! If she ever hears—— Go, will you? I'll see you tomorrow, any place, only now get out. I'll make it worth your while." A crafty gleam came into his eyes. "What's to prevent me from killing you right here on the spot, Reynolds? You're here as a burglar, and I'd be perfectly justified——"

"Yeah?" Reynolds laughed again wickedly. "You'll do it—*nit!*" he rasped. "You got a record—think you could break clean? And anyway"—he jumped up swiftly and jerked the drooping weapon from the man's fingers—"you couldn't now."

At this moment Red Loevner came forth. He understood the state of affairs, and knew that further hiding was no longer necessary. The man's face grew even whiter as he caught sight of this new menace; his eyes roved frantically.

"Oh, and I forgot to tell you," Russ Reynolds said, grinning, "I've a pal with me. We came to clean out this little abode, and we're goin' to."

"Not so loud—not so loud," the man pleaded. "She'll hear you! Get out, Rey-

nolds, before it's too late, will you? There's nothing of value in this house. I—I'll give you——"

But Reynolds ignored him. "Red," he said to Loevner in a tone saturated with mockery, "let me introduce you to Mister Rothschild, known to the bulls as 'Gentleman Harry.' Mister Rothschild can play second-story man as good as any of 'em, but he's also a gentleman, unnerstand, and he now and then hits it high with sassiety to turn a trick. Witness now. He's playin' this Miss Clainton for a sucker—blackmail game, y' know."

The face of Gentleman Harry was ashy—ashy to his very lips, which were trembling. His brown-black eyes fired. He was like a rat that, cornered, might spring. But his mind raced fast. A most ingenious criminal, he was quick to see the futility of an appeal that bore no attention to his oppressors.

"Reynolds, there's a wall-safe in this room. You've got a gun. If you make me open the safe I've got to—see? I'll do that; I've learnt the combination. You can have everything in it. But then get out—and quietly."

"And leave you to your game? How 'bout it, Red?"

"That's the best," Loevner assented. "We'll be gettin' the swag 'thout trouble. And we might come in on this play o' his later—see? If you kill it we're out there."

"All right, Red. But I know this gentleman boy. He's sly as a fox. I worked with him on one or two jobs, and I know. Now, Harry, where is this safe?"

Rothschild hesitated. He started to cross to that picture whose incongruity of place had struck Reynolds's attention. But he stopped short. His back to the door, he was quick to sense a new atmosphere, a fresh pressure of air in the room. He swerved about.

Something had happened.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

MISS CLAINTON upon leaving Rothschild, whom she knew only as Richard Pert, went through the long tier of rooms to the kitchen, where she placed a kettle of water to boil. In five minutes it was sizzling merrily. She got the serving table, tray and cups, but before bringing it out a thought occurred to her. She went upstairs to hastily change to a gown less formal. Tripping down the stairs, she passed the partly open library door, but as yet Reynolds and Loevner had not appeared on the scene. She went into the kitchen again, placed the urn and some bakery cake from the ice-chest on the table, and started rolling it toward the library.

She was in the dining chamber when she paused. What were those little buzzings, those almost indiscernible rustlings that came to her ears? She couldn't know at first, but then realization struck home. What could they be, if not a voice—voices! Odd that was. Richard wasn't in the habit of talking to himself, nor of reading aloud. And she and he were the only ones in the house, she thought, only to find her mistake.

Rage—surging, shrieking rage—swept through her as, catching every word as clearly as tingling bells, she began to understand the drift of that conversation. So this man, this handsome, well-groomed, poised fellow whom she'd known as Richard Pert, was a common thief, an associate of thieves, of housebreakers! So this Richard Pert, whom she'd met in the highest of society, was playing her, winning her love, to compromise her and then blackmail her! So this man, whom she'd considered to be of the highest, noblest type, was really a snake, a worming thing as low as dust, a vile creature to be stepped upon and obliterated without the least compunction!

She was stunned. She listened only with a sort of gnawing deadness in her. A sob caught in her throat then. Her first anger was gone. Cool now, and all the more to be feared, she went from that door. The significance of the fact that there were robbers in the house she would not see. She saw only that she was being tricked. Her eyes, usually blue, were narrowed and gray. She went into the dining-room, thence upstairs, and got a tiny automatic from a drawer.

Down the hallway stairs she came, mov-

ing silently, yet somehow with the suggestion of the tigress. The weapon trembled to her touch. It was a wonder she didn't stumble and fall; her muddled brain could not possibly have directed the action of her feet with clarity. Outside the door she listened again; heard Rothschild's suggestion of opening the safe—heard Reynolds's query and Loevner's answer—waited five more seconds—then went in!

She had the drop on them, too. Her silent swiftness took them by surprise. Russ Reynolds, anticipating nothing, held the gun he had taken from Rothschild awry. He had no time to make even a move.

"Drop that!" she cried at him, querulous force vibrating her voice.

A half-laugh, half-growl issuing from his throat, he placed it on the table. Rothschild, who had turned swiftly about, released a sharp sound, as of intaking breath. What little color he had regained again poured from his face, leaving it white as snow.

"Now, lady——" Red Loevner began.

"Shut up!" She turned upon him with a wrath that blazed. "If any one of you three scoundrels make one threatening move I won't countenance it. I'll shoot! Now, Mr. Rothschild, *alias* Mr. Richard Pert—how cute a name to have picked up!—go on and talk. Before I call the police tell me some more of your infernal lies!"

A less brazen, less astute man than Gentleman Harry Rothschild would have hung his head in shame, anxious to avoid those angry eyes. But not so he.

"Miss Clainton—Jewel—I admit I have not told you what I should—of my past—but there's some vast misunderstanding here—you can't understand. I know these—these men, yes; but their insinuations are untrue. So help me, Jewel, I've played fair with you."

"You lie!" she shrieked. "I was out there listening. I heard every bit of what was said. You would turn the contents of that safe over to them, would you, so as to let you alone to put one over on me?"

"Jewel—I—you—I don't really intend that." He was groping now—groping for an answer that might strike the breeze of her belief. "You don't understand, Jewel."

"Don't dare call me that! Cur! Snake!" The automatic shook. She was near the breaking point.

"Jewel——"

"Don't come near me!" About to take a step forward, the shriek of those words made him recoil. "I'll kill you—you and your thieving friends! I'll shoot you down like rats!" The weapon shook more and more. Her voice rose piercingly: "Filth! Scum! To think—o-ooh-h!"

The tears, pent-up, came with a rush. They all but blinded her. But the weapon didn't sag. The trigger finger was fast against that lethal projection. She relaxed her tensed body and leaned against the door.

Red Loevner, the least of the three to be noticed by her, suddenly flew forward. His scurrying fist knocked the automatic from her grasp. It pattered on the soft blue carpet. She uttered a sound—a shrill yell that carried in it fear and hate and fury and loathing—a world of revulsion, and threw up her arms as though to strike at Loevner.

But she didn't.

She grew suddenly limp. Her eyes glazed. She dropped in a faint to the floor.

But it wasn't entirely Red Loevner's bold move in bringing on her insensibility. There was another factor—an outside force; the crowning shock of a series of shocks that combined in forcing a nullification of her senses.

It was the ringing of the front doorbell!

Mr. Seymour A. Lains, known to the police as "White" Lyonson, had escorted Mrs. Clainton to the opera this evening. Mrs. Clainton was a widow, and very rich. She was leaning toward middle age, true, but then White Lyonson was no youngster himself. His hair was well-nigh white; but it was a distinguished white, as he was distinguished in bearing.

The figuring of Lains, alias Lyonson, was this:

"If I can marry this widow I'm in soft. Then I'll lay still and live easy. No more worrying where the next five thousand is coming from. But I've got to watch my step. Gentleman Harry is keen to me."

From which it may be inferred that White Lyonson was fortune-hunting—

"playing" Mrs. Clainton for a "sucker"; even as Gentleman Harry had been playing her daughter.

The opera over, they joined several of Mrs. Clainton's bespangled friends and inaugurated a café party. Gentleman Harry and Jewel Clainton had left the opera an hour ago, because to them it had been "sort of fatiguing." Out on the wide pavement about to get into a cab Mrs. Clainton, who was a woman of whims, suddenly exclaimed:

"My shawl! Good gracious, I've left it home. And here I haven't missed it all through the opera! Seymour, will you go and get it for me?"

With her instructions where to find the shawl, Mrs. Clainton had given him the house key, in case he'd find the younger couple not there. But he rang the bell once, anyway, and waited. Then he opened the door and went in.

As he stepped from the vestibule into the dimly-lit hallway he was conscious of a peculiar unease. The library door stood several inches ajar, and through that aperture emanated a shuffling, or a swishing, or the incantation of stilled voices. He went to the library door to investigate.

That proved a misstep. Something glistening and gray was thrust in his face. Its lone eye regarded him unwaveringly. A harsh voice hissed:

"Keep shut and come in the library! Not a yip, now!"

He obeyed. The voice had in it the ring of command not to be disobeyed. His blood chilled when he saw who were in that room. Gentleman Harry Rothschild, standing aloof, somewhat pallid of face, but trying to put up a brave front. A grim-faced burglar leering at him. The huddled figure of Miss Clainton on the couch. And last the man with the weapon, familiar as the morning sun. Russ Reynolds of all unholy things!

The recognition was mutual. Russ Reynolds snickered wickedly:

"Well, well! You, too, eh, Mister 'White' Lyonson? What's your little game? The old dame, eh? Makin' much headway? Funny thing this. That you two slick babies should pick out a ma and her girl!"

Recovering his bearings, White Lyonson glared.

"You fool!" Lyonson cried. "What the devil is this? What does it mean?"

Like a cord suddenly wired, Gentleman Harry stiffened. His game was up, and he knew it, but with this came the joyful sense of knowing that White Lyonson couldn't get the Clainton fortune either.

"It means your play's over, you white rat! You're beaten! Miss Clainton's wise——"

"Wise? Talk straight."

"You know bloomin' well what I mean! It's all over now but the shouting. Reynolds and this pal of his broke in here and surprised me. Miss Clainton was behind the door and heard what we said. She came in with a gun, mad as the deuce. She almost shot me. It's a good thing she fainted."

"Yeah? Well, I don't care a hang what she'd have done to you. It'd been good riddance. How do you figure I'm done?"

"How do you figure you're not?"

Their eyes shot glances of hate.

"Hang you!" White Lyonson finally cried, with a tremendous fury, "you've wrecked a sure game! I'm done with you! It was the same with that Roth jewel trick, too. You got the jewel right under my nose. You did it neatly. And I, like a fool, believed at the time it wasn't there!"

"You're crazy!" Gentleman Harry shouted. "You were the one that double-crossed me. You were the one that got away with the Roth jewel. You talk! It was there, all right. It's been a year since we made that trick, or tried to make it, and I've believed all along that you got away with it!"

White Lyonson was about to make some furious rejoinder, but Russ Reynolds interposed. He backed the two society crooks into a corner, while a smile lurked about his set lips. It was just the suggestion of a smile that spoke of a secret knowledge.

"Listen, buddies," he purred. "Me and Red Loevner here are goin' to make a haul

tonight—right in this shack. Then we'll beat it. See? We'll leave you two then to work out your own salvation over this mess. But before that, buddies, I'm goin' to put you wise to a little sweet knowledge. You can reflect on 'at while me and Red work.

"Now y' haven't forgotten that I was also with you on that Roth job. Y' thought then that I wasn't good enough t' work side by side with you—that the best thing for me was lookout. Well, here I am, Russ Reynolds, not as clever as you two boys, but clever enough to have gotten that Roth jewel right from under your noses! Yes, I got it, playing lookout on the outside, or so you thought. I got it, while you two buddies wasted an hour on that scientific bunk o' breakin' in. I pulled off with it, and no one the wiser. While you fools suspected each other, thought the other was playin' a gyp game, I got off with it!"

Russ Reynolds!

His drawling words amazed Rothschild and Lyonson. They turned to stare at him. So it was Reynolds who'd gotten off with that jewel! Reynolds, the big blundering boob, of all people! They had never suspected it, of course. But how was it possible? Yes, it was! During the time they'd thought him on the outside, keeping watch, he'd gotten in and away with it.

They couldn't understand it. A hundred questions were in their minds, but they refrained from voicing them. What did it matter? That was past. They must be keen and alive to the present disagreeable situation.

Russ Reynolds, backing away, placed the weapon on the table within quick reach. He turned sharply to Red Loevner.

"We've got to work fast, Red. This girl 'll be coming to in about fifteen minutes. Le's go."

"Wha—what——" he began.

He couldn't understand it. Why should Red Loevner, his own pal, point an automatic so steadily upon him?

"Thanks very much, Russ, for that confession. It does away with a lot of trouble," said Red Loevner. But it was a different Red Loevner—a Loevner that spoke without a nasal twang, without the accent habitual to underworld denizens. It was a crisp Red Loevner, who smiled from sparkling eyes.

"You don't understand? I'll explain. I'm Detective Berney Halls, alias Philadelphia Red Loevner. I've played a game just as White Lyonson and Gentleman Harry Rothschild have played, only I've succeeded and they failed."

Russ Reynolds saw it all then. It came to him in a series of bewildering flashes. He had been with a dick, a pigeon, all the time, given away his big secret to the one in the world he shouldn't have told it to.

The room revolved slowly before Russ Reynolds's gaze. Yes, he saw it all, only too clearly. Red Loevner's reputation as an underworld character had been built up, raised by word of mouth, circulated by stool-pigeons. Tears almost came to his eyes with the mortification of it.

Out of bleared eyes he watched the detective move to the telephone—move like a panther, wary, watchful. He saw the futility of a false move, and gave it up. As though from distant fields he heard the detective say into the mouth-piece:

Give me the nearest police station."

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## THIRTY YEARS IN SING SING

EDWARD PURTELL, convicted of a daring hold-up of a $14,000 payroll of the International Motors Company in Long Island City, was taken to Sing Sing to start a sentence of thirty years imposed upon him by County Judge Baker in Queens County Court.

Purtell was found guilty on three counts in connection with the hold-up. He wounded the cashier of the International Company by shooting him. His lawyer, Sidney Rosenthal, has started appeal proceedings. The presiding judge denied Purtell a new trial.

# *The* Random Shot

By JAMES BENEDICT

McQUEEN'S genial air deserted him. The bank official's pudgy face lost its ruddy color. His shaking fingers, pausing in the act of selecting a cigar from the half-filled box on his bureau, ploughed through his thinning lusterless hair. His thin lips pressed together. The drooping lids narrowed over his bleak eyes.

A discreet, scarcely perceptible "kuish, kuish," like the sound of water in leaky shoes, betrayed the approach of some one prowling along the hall. A floor board creaked. McQueen slipped through a connecting door into his bedroom. At the same moment a tall, slim young man about twenty-eight years old, in a dripping dingy coat and battered soft hat, entered. A grim determination sharpened his clean-cut features and clouded his candid blue eyes. But as if by magic his sober gaze lightened. The harassing lines were ironed out of his pallid face.

"Hello, McQueen," he said carelessly.

"Searles!" barked McQueen, who had dragged open a bureau drawer. "Searles!"

"You don't look delighted to see me."

"It's lucky for you I didn't kill you," declared McQueen. "What do you mean by breaking in here tonight? Don't you know it's folly for you to come back to Clayton at all?"

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Searles. "Dangerous for some one." Removing his dripping felt hat, he shook it onto the polished floor. The electric light pitilessly revealed his prison pallor and closely cropped hair.

"I knew you were out. I saw it in the papers. I told Inspector Burns to run you out of town if you came back. We don't want your kind in Clayton."

"What!" exclaimed Searles. "You told the police about me? Say, what did you do that for?"

"Because you're a crook," the other growled more confidently. "And your kind seldom change. You thought you could come back here and start something. Your breaking in tonight proves it."

"That's so. It does look that way."

Searles stared doubtfully down at his dingy drenched coat and hat. He appeared slightly crestfallen, when suddenly, at some hidden thought, his red lips curled back over his white teeth. He chuckled appreciatively.

"Gee! You're a nervy one!" kept on McQueen. "Just out of jail, you break into the house of one who once trusted you. And then you are surprised because he doesn't welcome you like a pal! You were my friend and bank associate, Searles. I don't like to do it. But you've left me no alternative."

McQueen broke off and reached for the telephone on a stand by the side of his bed.

"Hold on!" said Searles. "Don't do that! Listen! I went to Johnson tonight to borrow a couple of dollars. I was stony, but I knew better than to come to you. And Johnson told me."

"What?"

*"Everything!"*

McQueen carefully set down the phone. He began to speak, choosing his words carefully, while an insincere smile squirmed about the corners of his thin-lipped mouth.

"I guess I misjudged you. I've about decided not to phone after all. Perhaps I'm too good-natured. But I am what I am. I don't want to be hard on you."

Searles laughed sardonically. "Johnson says you ought to be dead, McQueen. He says if he weren't married and had a fami-

ly, he'd go and buy a gun and shoot you himself."

"Johnson? So that old fool's squawked. And I suppose you fell for his squawking?"

"Yep. Johnson's a fool. A fool like me; tortured five years behind stone and concrete for another man's job."

McQueen blinked his drooping eyelids as if to shut out an ugly picture.

"Johnson talks nonsense. He'll have to be taught to keep his mouth shut. My record as cashier and vice-president is so far clear. But not yours."

"It's too late to shut up Johnson, or me, either," said Searles defiantly. "You know why I went up for a crime I didn't do. I thought I was shielding Jamieson. A good joke—on me. I loved Sheila Jamieson. I wanted to save her shame, heartbreak——"

"What's the use of going over that? You better beat it now. You better drop out of sight."

"You'd like to be rid of me, eh?" Searles threw back his head and laughed. "I'm not surprised."

"Now, listen, Searles. Don't be a fool. And don't push me too far." A calculating gleam lit McQueen's eyes. He stepped to the door of his wife's boudoir, pushed it open, and switched on the light, then switched it off again. "Nobody there." He jerked about and glanced into his dressing-room. "Nobody—no eavesdroppers. All right. Now I'm going to put it up to you. Are you staying here?" Which means that you go back to jail. Or do you leave town at once?"

"Back to jail! Who's going to send me there? You?"

"Yep. You saw Johnson. But did you go to the police? No. Because they wouldn't believe you. But they'll listen to me. And I've got news for them. Several hours ago a crook entered Jamieson's house. He shot up the place, and stole a box of securities just left there by me. Unfortunately for you, this happened the very day you are back. I don't know who did it, Searles. And I don't care. My good judgment tells me to turn you over to the police, and send you up for the limit."

"You cheap, yellow crook," stuttered Searles, his face working with rage. "I'll go to jail if I stay, will I? If I leave, you will let it be known I came back only to steal. Is that it?"

McQueen shrugged and rummaged in a top bureau drawer.

"I keep a pistol somewhere here for house-breakers," he said pointedly. "I could shoot you down, or phone the police. Now will you go?"

"No," roared Searles. "I'll die first. Listen! I've been five years in jail. But that's nothing. I don't count. I'm any one's fool. And yet I'm tortured with a certain suspicion that's been bred and nursed up there all that time. So I'm back again. I snooped around. I saw Jamieson. He's ready to talk, and it turns out that you, not Jamieson, was the crook that bulldozed and duped that doddering old bookkeeper. Playing upon his fears, you got him to juggle a few figures and cover up your defalcations."

"That's a lie," blustered McQueen. "Johnson lied to you."

"No, it's the truth."

"It's a lie. But what if it ain't? What good is it going to do you? Why can't you be sensible and clear out?"

"Because that's your chance to give me the limit. You can put this robbery on me if I go. You framed me once before. Johnson's fixed books wouldn't get by with the bank examiner. You knew that. So what did you do? You thought of me. You knew how I felt about Sheila. You let me think *Jamieson* was the crook. I've been in hell for five years. But that was all right. I wrecked myself while you were living easy. I was eating my heart out, and you thought I was through, that I'd never come back, or if I did come back, my hands would be tied. But now I'm here. I've found you out. And, by Crimus, you—I ought to, but, no, I'm going easy on you. Sheila! I'll see her first. She'll listen to me. And Jamieson must know. I'll get my good name back, my place in the bank."

"No, you won't," growled McQueen.

Searles frowned.

"Why won't I?"

"You still love Sheila, don't you? Say, what's the matter with you, anyway? You went to jail for her, didn't you? You went through purgatory or worse. Well, then, to keep her happy, you ought to do one little thing more for her. Ain't that right?"

Searles stared, caught his breath, and waited.

McQueen nodded his head.

"Yes, you still care. Only you're wondering what's coming. You think I'm going to lie to you. But I'm not. What can I say to prove it? Suppose I say that by denouncing me you would be harming her. And not only would your five years be wasted, but you would be hurting her more than you ever dreamed."

"What are you driving at?" asked Searles sullenly.

"If you want proof——"

"Who wouldn't want proof?" cried Searles. "Sheila! Do you think it would irk Sheila, what happened to you? Is that what you're hinting? If so, save your breath. Sheila never liked you, McQueen, even when she thought you straight. She despised you. And now she might have a moment of pity for you—pity she would feel for a dog wiped out——"

"If you touched me it would kill her," McQueen's voice, gone out of control, rose almost to hysteria. "You won't go, so I'll let you have it. Sheila——" He broke off, and swung around toward the door of the bourdoir. "What's that?" he said sharply.

"What?"

"That noise."

"The wind."

"It's not the wind."

An explosion of light leaped up in the black doorway. McQueen's cry changed to a snarl of surprise. Searles stared uncomprehendingly.

A woman, pale, great-eyed, a wan, proud little smile just edging her lips, stood there, intently regarding them. McQueen's clenched hands pressed against his side.

"What's the idea of breaking in here like that?" he said, breathing heavily. What's up, Sheila? There's something wrong. I can see it in your face. Go back into your room. I'll join you."

"No."

Sheila, a well-poised young woman, was evidently calling upon all her poise to meet a remarkable situation. She threw back her expensive fur-trimmed wrap and looked at Searles. She came nearer, her lips curved in a smile, but his eyes never lost their first wondering look.

"David," she said.

"It's Sheila," gasped Searles.

"It's my wife," stormed McQueen. "Now that you understand, get out."

Searles only looked at Sheila.

"It's all true," said Sheila, no longer smiling, but with something like a sob in her voice. "I've stood it for five years—terrible years. He showed me proofs. Proofs that dad, too, was in trouble at the bank. I didn't know. I had no time to think. I married him. It was what he wanted."

"That's a rotten thing to say." McQueen turned to Searles. "And she knows you'll believe anything. Look at her. She's tired of me. She's making a play for you."

"If she's tired of you, as you say, McQueen, I guess you'd better go."

At Searles's voice McQueen gave a snatch at something in the open bureau drawer. And when he whirled around there was a pistol in his hand.

"You crook," he began, fear and rage in his voice. "You break in here without warning. I've caught you with my wife. The law can't touch me." There was madness in his laugh as he raised the weapon.

"David!" screamed Sheila.

"Go away, Sheila." Searles's blue eyes flamed in his pallid face. "Leave him to me," he said, edging inch by inch toward McQueen as he spoke.

McQueen threw up his gun in the air and then slowly swung it downward. His fingers pressed against the trigger. But some hidden thing, perhaps the swash of rain against the window, a crying protest of the wind, an intangible fear drawing near under cover of the storm, made him waver and half lower the gun.

Sheila stared as if fascinated. Her frightened gaze never left the two men. No doubt the impending crisis for the moment

robbed her of thought and action. But when McQueen again raised his pistol, almost prodding with its black mouth the point of a knife clutched by Searles, her lips broke their silence.

And with her cry two men, stepping around her, appeared out of the boudoir.

The taller of the two, square-shouldered, impressive looking, because of his wide, strong mouth, determined chin and inordinately alert eyes, held an automatic level with his waist.

"You won't need that gun, McQueen," he said. "Let me see it."

"Burns!" gasped McQueen. "What luck!"

Without replying the Police Inspector broke open McQueen's gun, emptying it of its bright cartridges.

"Stop him," McQueen cried, excitedly backing out of Searles's reach. "He's got a knife."

The Inspector's young assistant was holding a flat black box in his hands. He handed this box to Sheila, and with a laugh appropriated the knife.

Burns, concluding his leisurely examination of the pistol, leaned confidentially over McQueen. The next instant, quick as a flash, he grappled with the amazed bank officer. The powerfully built Inspector quickly subdued McQueen, and having clicked the handcuffs over his wrists stepped back.

"What's the meaning of this outrage?" stammered McQueen, white and glaring. "I'll have you broke, kicked off the force for this, Burns."

"No, you won't." The Inspector grinned. "Your wife brought us in here. Unknown to you, she happened to be at Jamieson's house when the shooting occurred. We found the black box downstairs."

McQueen's head went up. His reckless mouth hardened. The lids drooped over his slaty eyes.

"Say, Burns, you're making one awful mistake. I happen to know about that shooting."

"Huh? Oh, all right. But remember what you say can be used against you."

"Never mind that," objected McQueen. "Listen. It was so dark nobody knows who shot Jamieson. That's what you think. But I happen to know. I had just left the house, when I saw that crook"—pointing to Searles—"dash out of the door, leap the fence and head for the Main Street bridge. He dropped his gun into the water."

A throaty explosion came from Searles. But Burns intervened.

"That's no good, McQueen," he said. "We were in the next room when you were having it out with Searles."

"Having it out? What do you mean? What did you hear?"

"You begged him to clear out, didn't you? If you saw him attack Jamieson, why didn't you hold him and send for us?"

McQueen smiled.

"You heard me stalling Searles along," he said evenly—"making up a yarn to hold him until help arrived."

"Your talk was damaging," said Burns. "But if your own words won't convict you this will." He broke, and held out his hands for the flat black box his assistant had given to Sheila. "You left this box with President Jamieson, telling him the mechanism of the bank vault seemed out of order. Isn't that right?"

"How do you know that's the box?" growled McQueen.

"This box was taken from the bank vault, and after handing it to Jamieson you made an excuse and hurried out. The minute you left the house the lights went out, when the wires were cut by you or possibly a confederate. You then re-entered the house, foolishly blazed away with your gun, and after snatching up the box from a desk where you had just dropped it you fled."

"Where do you get your information?" sneered McQueen. "You ought to be an author."

"Why, the box is *empty*," cried Sheila.

The Inspector, after fumbling with the fastenings, had now raised the lid.

McQueen laughed.

"Just what I expected. Better relieve me of these bracelets, and slip them on that crook before he escapes." He glowered at Searles.

"This box is empty because there never were any securities in it," Burns declared. "It was your plan, McQueen, to let us think society or bank burglars stole in this empty box all of the loot taken by you at various times from the bank."

"Do you know that, Burns? You can't prove it. You've got nothing on me. You can't even prove that I re-entered Jamieson's house."

"Oh, yes, we can." Burns next words were dramatic. "*Your wife saw you!*"

"Sheila saw me?" faltered McQueen. "Why, you're contradicting yourself. Didn't you just say the lights went out before the box was stolen?"

Burns nodded.

"You're hooked by your own cleverness, McQueen. Before you re-entered the house the light were out. But you made a mistake. You bungled it."

"What do you mean?"

"When you returned into the house to steal the box, you couldn't let well enough alone. Without expecting to hit anybody, on general principles, I suppose, you exploded your gun. That was not only unnecessary, but downright foolish."

McQueen wet his dry lips with his tongue.

"Go on," he said.

"Yep, you did. How you came to wing Jamieson in the shoulder I don't know. But your wife, who had just groped her way downstairs, distinguished your features by the flash of the weapon."

"I don't believe—— Such a thing's incredible."

"Experimentation has proved it credible. From the make of the weapon used, the charge and distance and so on, a solution can be worked out."

"Absurd," mouthed McQueen.

Burns picked up McQueen's pistol.

"Did you fire this gun tonight?"

"No."

"That, too, can be determined."

McQueen stared.

"I mean," Burns explained, "that you must have cleaned this gun after returning home. But there is a way to tell if it has been fired, and how long a time elapsed since it *was* fired."

"Searles fired that shot," reiterated McQueen. "I tell you I saw him. Later he threw his gun into the river. And then I followed him here."

"You're a liar," snapped Burns. "You never saw Searles until he entered this room. For the last twelve hours Searles has been trailed by one of my men."

McQueen seemed to give way.

"Oh, we've got you," persisted Burns. "We've even got the bullet out of your gun, which just scratched Jamieson's shoulder and lodged in the banisters. And here's the empty cartridge that bullet belonged to. More evidence. A careful study of that cartridge will determine the make and factory from which the gun came. It will turn out to be this gun of yours that I hold in my hand. Now you had better come along with us."

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## NURSE ACCUSED OF FAKING PRESCRIPTION

FORGERY of a prescription upon which she is alleged to have been attempting to obtain morphine is the charge against Miss Mae Dean, a trained nurse.

Miss Dean says she is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University. She was arrested in the drugstore of Viscardi Brothers by Detectives Tierney and Winberry of the West Sixty-eighth street station, after Dr. James M. McTiernan, a specialist at the Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, had telephoned the detectives that he had signed no such prescription as Miss Dean presented. When one of the Viscardi brothers observed that the prescription blank was that of Dr. McTiernan, he became suspicious and before filling the prescription telephoned to the doctor, who said he believed the prescription was a forgery.

# What Handwriting Reveals

**CONDUCTED BY LOUISE RICE**

**Send us a specimen of your writing with the coupon printed on page 63 and Miss Rice will analyze the handwriting free of charge. The answer will be published in a future number of this magazine. Only a limited number of replies can be printed in each issue, owing to lack of space. If you desire an earlier reply in the form of a personal letter from Miss Rice, send us the sample of your writing and the coupon, and enclose 10 cents and a self-addressed stamped envelope, to cover the cost of handling, stationery, etc., and Miss Rice will promptly send you an answer. No readings will be given unless accompanied by a coupon for each individual.**

—THE EDITOR.

H. M. W.—You have a good many of the characteristics of H. D. M., whose letter came with yours. But in your handwriting there is more evidence of self-control and of the ability to act on thought and not on impulse. You have a temper and your ambitions are stronger than H. D. M.'s. You are fond of pleasure, but not apt to be extravagant, and you have the moral courage which would help you to stick at a thing until you got what you wanted from it. Your will power is weak. See that short "t' bar? Bolster this up and your character will be interesting.

H. D. M.—The fact that you have not yet succeeded in making your hand really control your pen shows, at the first glance, that your character is not yet mature. In fact, I would guess that you were very young in years as well. You are, however, possessed of many very pleasant traits and of some which will be strong and worth while after a time. You have courage, for one thing, and the ability to accept trouble cheerfully and hopefully. You are very fond of having a good time, and I suspect that you are more than a little lazy, which is by far the most discouraging element in your character. In many ways you have the ability to get out of this weakness. All that is needed is the kind of a spur that will make you fight for success. You are loving but jealous.

STANLEY W., Stapleton.—And so you want to know whether it makes any difference in your handwriting that your right forefinger is off, eh? No, not at all. You could tie a pencil to your right foot and your writing, although awkward, would show the same characteristics as usual; or, you can take a pencil in your mouth and write with it and still leave your character to be easily read by the graphologist. Your handwriting shows me that yours is a character in which there is exceptional inventiveness. I am sure that it is this which would give you real success. That underscore of your signature shows that your personality is a dominant one. It ought to help you to get financial backing for the inventions you want to make.

DOROTHY DEAN.—No, I don't think much of "scientific selection of mates" for humans. Even with high-bred dogs, there is a persistent effort on the part of males and females to choose certain mates. The higher we go in the animal kingdom, you see, the more does individuality become the dominant thing, and that is what influences the human being. You go ahead and marry this very fine young man whose handwriting you enclose. He is a delightful nature, and I am sure that he and you will be very happy; and don't you pay any attention to the old croaker of a scientist who told you all that nonsense.

# *Watch For These Stories!*

George Bronson-Howard's Masterpiece of Detective Fiction

## "THE HOODWINKER"

**An Exciting Novelette, to Appear in Our Next Issue**

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Did you hear WJZ broadcast JOE BURKE'S dramatic story

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Send LOUISE RICE a sample of your penmanship and she will analyze it free, and give you a character-reading in our columns. Thousands are doing it. Miss Rice's uncanny power of reading your character is amazing!

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## HERE ARE THE SHORT STORIES

**"BUTTON! BUTTON!" by Paul E. Triem**
**"REUNION," by Laurence D'Orsay**
**"THE HYPNOTIC MYSTERY," by Earl W. Scott**
**"THE CLUE IN THE WATCH," by Carl G. Hodges**
**"MIXED TRAILS," by Freeman Harrison**

Every one of these stories were selected with the greatest care to give our readers only the very best fiction obtainable.

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## SPECIAL ARTICLES

Be sure to look for the shorter articles and items with which we fill the rest of the magazine, as they are mighty interesting.

If you like the contents of this publication you will confer a favor by mentioning it to your friends.

THE EDITOR.

# MYSTERY MAGAZINE

**The feature stories already published in this magazine are worth reading. The following are the titles of the novelettes contained in the numbers already printed.**

107 "Hell's Hinges," by Hamilton Craigie.
108 "The Wolf," by Katherine Stagg.
109 "The Brass Button," by Jack Bechdolt.
110 "A Whispering Mummy," by Chas. F. Oursler.
111 "Trapping the Jewel Smugglers," by B. Poynter.
112 "The Missing Evidence," by Harold F. Podhaski.
113 "A Clue by Radio," by Capt. Jack Static.
114 "The District Attorney's Secret," by C. Oursler.
115 "A Man From Headquarters," by H. Craigie.
116 "The Girl in the Case," by Carl Glick.
117 "A Scientific Detective," by D. G. McDonald.
118 "Number Nine Queer Street," by Jack Bechdolt.
119 "Trailed by a Private Detective," by Gottlieb Jacobs.
120 "The Mouse Trap," by Edith Sessions Tupper.
121 "A Radio Mystery," by Capt. Jack Static
122 "The Clawing Death," by Beulah Poynter.
123 "A Master of Millions," by Chas. Fulton Oursler
124 "The Secret of Room 13," by Hamilton Craigie.
125 "Six Months to Live," by George Bronson-Howard.
126 "Seals of Wax," by Jack Bechdolt.
127 "When Crooks Conspire," by Harold F. Podhaski.
128 "The Mystery of the Blue Car," by H. Craigie.
129 "The Detective and the Law," by Frederick F. Shuey.
130 "The Hand in the Dark," by Chas. F. Oursler.
131 "The Trail of a Rogue," by George Bronson-Howard.
132 "The Woman from Nowhere," by Jack Bechdolt
133 "The Time Detective," by Frank Blighton.
134 "The Whispering-Room," by Frederick C. Davis.
135 "One Clue Missing," by Chas. F. Oursler.
136 "The Doom of the Damned," by Joe Burke.
137 "The Consuming Death," by Gilbert Hammond.
138 "Mrs. Deane's Jewels," by Beatrice S. Luisi.
139 "The Brass Voice," by Jack Bechdolt.
140 "For Shame," by Wm. Hamilton Osborne.
141 "The Triple Cross," by Hamilton Craigie.
142 "Blood Rubies," by J. Werner Phelps.
143 "I'll Win! I'll Win!" by Arthur B. Reeve and Margaret W. Reeve.
144 "Phantom Fingers," by George Bronson-Howard.
145 "On the Yellows," by Frank Blighton.
146 "The Argentine Ruby," by Beulah and Shirley Poynter.
147 "The Barrington Arms Case," by Jack Bechdolt.
148 "Hounded," by Frank Blighton.
149 "Direct Action," by Dr. Harry Enton.
150 "The Footprints On the Ceiling," by Chas. Fulton Oursler.
151 "The One Chance," by Thomas Ripley.
152 "Weapons of Hate," by Eric Howard.
153 "In Reserve," by Frank Blighton.
154 "The House on the Rocks," by Jack Bechdolt.

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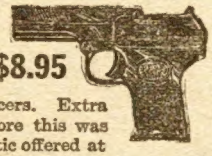

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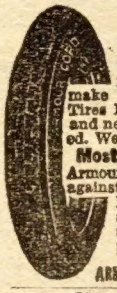

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A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An answer to an ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" nor a financial formula. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—human happiness, especially in the later years of life. And there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of the practical where values must be proved. It "works." And because it does work—most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is in its virtue for lifting the physical handicaps resulting from the premature waning of the vital forces of life, whether due to overwork, over-worry, sickness or the general over-expenditure of nervous energy in the strenuous living typical of the modern day. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes

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But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of summer too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verse, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search, without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth"—the means for renewing energy and extending the summer time of life.

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